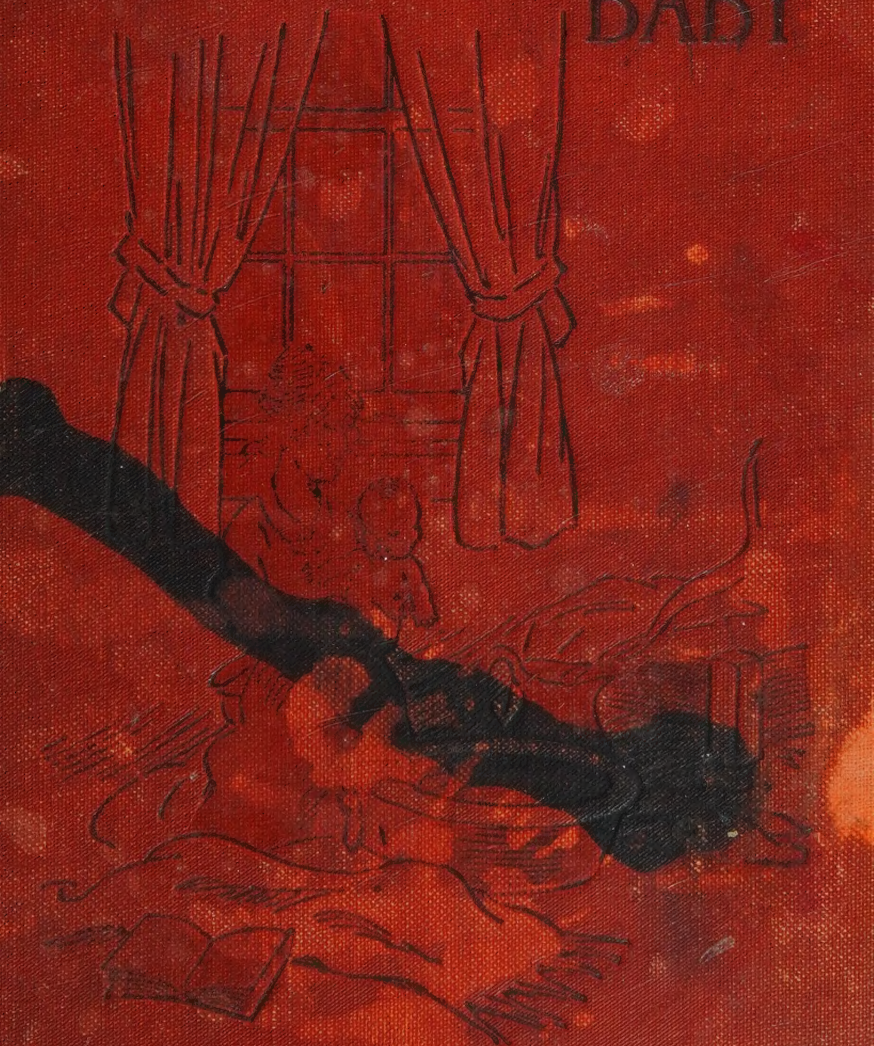
MISS MINERVA'S BABY



C. E. Tornallen

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Miss Minerva's Baby

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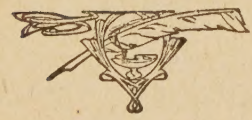
BY

EMMA SPEED SAMPSON

Author of
"Billy and the Major"



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CHICAGO

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MISS MINERVA'S BABY

CHAPTER I

A BOOK-FED BABY

THINGS had been moving pretty rapidly for Miss Minerva in the last year and a half, so rapidly that it was all that poor lady could do to keep up with them. No wonder she felt a bit dazed. She had arrived at that comfortably uncertain age, looked upon by women in general as a time for well-earned repose, when things began to happen, things anything but reposeful.

The first was William Green Hill. The coming of this orphaned nephew into her well-ordered, spinster existence was the

bitterest draught the austere Miss Minerva had ever been forced to swallow. If only he had been a niece it would not have been so bad, but she had always hated boys and it was hard to have this one thrust upon her; but duty was duty, and Miss Minerva was nothing if not conscientious. She swallowed the draught that Fate had concocted for her, although she held her nose and made a terrible face the while.

The next thing that happened was the Major. Marrying the Major was perhaps the most strenuous happening of all. Miss Minerva had always hated boys and had always hated men in proportion, but having swallowed the boy she was somewhat prepared to swallow the man, finding him not so bitter after all.

After Billy, the Major, and after the Major, a rapid succession of happenings! It was not enough to have these two mas-

culine creatures hurled into the quiet order of her uneventful days, but on top of them came members of the colored race, her pet abomination, first Wilkes Booth Lincoln, then Aunt Cindy. Following fast in their wake were bicycles, that littered up the passage and tracked dirt in her spotless house; a goat, that had devoured everything in sight and ignominiously butted the Major so that gentleman had temporarily abandoned his lifelong practice of sitting down at meal time; then a pony, although it was against Miss Minerva's principles to put temptation in the shape of horse-flesh in her nephew's path.

All these happenings, disturbing and exciting as they proved, were nothing compared to the final happening, which was — the baby! That mite of an infant caused such upheaval in Miss Minerva's nature as geology teaches us occurred in primeval

convulsions of the earth. Miss Minerva could no more get back to the calm level of her maiden days than the mountains could sink themselves to the plains.

The neighbors watched with unflagging interest the rapid changes in the life of their respected townswoman, who was still Miss Minerva to them and always would be, no matter how many majors she might marry or how many babies she might have. When the baby arrived and in the leading paper the citizens of the town read the following announcement, "Born to Major and Mrs. Joseph Estes, a girl," there was confusion in the minds of some as to who Mrs. Joseph Estes could be, so accustomed were they to thinking of and calling her just "Miss Minerva."

The only person who accepted Miss Minerva's having the baby as quite a matter of course was the baby herself. A short

time after her arrival she yielded to the inevitable and turned to her mother with the astounding instinct of the newly-born.

"Aunt Cindy, she knows me!" whispered Miss Minerva, "I really believe Josephine knows me!"

"Sho' she do! Ef a baby don't know its own mammy, whose mammy air it gonter know? The good Gawd done ordinated that folks should have mo' thinkin' sense than critters, but jes' plain mammy sense he done give ter all alike. Ef a lil chicken, what ain't mo'n cracked its shell, kin pick out its mammy from a whole yard full er hins although its mammy's speckles mought be the spittin' image er all the res' er the hins, it 'ud be right strange if the outcome of the lords er cremation couldn't pick out its own mammy whin there wa'n't nothing else to choose from."

Miss Minerva meekly accepted this bit

of natural history. She was at first very humble concerning Josephine, having neither experience nor theories with which to combat Aunt Cindy's flaunted omniscience. So long as the trained nurse was with her she accepted whatever that efficient young woman did or said as hitherto she had accepted the Gospel and the Gospel alone. The trained nurse was gone now and Miss Minerva was left to flounder in what seemed to her an infinity of motherhood.

Where was her former independence of thought and action, where her boasted capability? Was this the same Minerva who had always prided herself that she could do anything she set her mind to? Was this the strong-minded woman who unaided had conducted her financial affairs successfully? Was this the housekeeper whose bread always took the prize at the county

fair; whose cake was carefully marked and set aside to be cut for the visiting ministers at the camp meetings; whose recipes for pickle and preserves were constantly in demand? Were those the same capable hands that had kept mahogany in such a high state of polish; could milk, if need be, or clean a stove; take the smallest stitches at the sewing society or turn the neatest sock heel in town? Could those be the same hands that trembled so pitifully at the simple task of washing a little baby?

Miss Minerva had watched the trained nurse performing this rite every morning for a month. It had seemed so easy that she was sure she could do it, but now that the time had come for her to put into practice the knowledge she had gained by observation, she found herself as helpless as the graduate of a correspondence course in swimming who falls into the sea.

A baby fully clothed is a slippery thing and difficult to hold, but a baby naked, wet and soapy — there is no describing its yielding elusiveness. To make the task more

difficult, Josephine was yelling lustily. She never had cried when the trained nurse bathed her but had behaved like a little duck during her ablutions. Now she seemed to be making up for all the lost

opportunities. She screamed loudly and Miss Minerva wept silently. The child was soaped and must be put in the tub of water. If it had not been for her commanding sense of duty the trembling mother would have dried the infant, soap and all, and hurried her into garments, but the nurse always had put her in the tub so into the tub Josephine must go. Miss Minerva grasped her daughter desperately. It was like holding an eel.

"If only Aunt Cindy would come!" she sobbed.

Aunt Cindy's attitude towards the trained nurse had been one of barely concealed scorn, and now that she had gone the old woman was waiting in dignified dudgeon to be asked to care for the baby. Her arms ached for the little creature and her warm heart yearned for it, but the rebuff she had met with when the child was

only a few hours old still rankled in her faithful bosom. She had merely done what she considered right, yet the nurse had, as she expressed it, in recounting the adventure to Mrs. Garner's cook, Sarah Jane, most snatched her baldheaded.

"I ain't done nothin' but give the infant a piece er fat bakin rime ter suck lak I been a seein' give ter babies sence I wa' bawn, whin that white gal what calls herse'f a nuss flew at me, lak a settin' goose."

"'Whe'fo' you done did sech a monstrocious deed?' dat nuss jes' shouted.

"An' I done tol' her it wa' needcessitous so's the chile could 'form her functioms, but she snatched dat bakin rime away from the po' lil thing. Gawd be praised though she done sucked some er the suption out befo' that white gal come erlong an' got 'nough er that salt meat to make her 'form her functioms lak I knowed it would. Dat

nuss, she thinks I don't know nothin' 'bout babies an' dat's what she done tol' Miss Minerva — I don't know nothin' 'bout babies! Huh! Reckon I done buried mo' babies than she's nussed."

Now Aunt Cindy in her kitchen heard the shrill wails of the month-old baby; so did Sarah Jane next door; so did Billy and Jimmy Garner playing knucks on the smooth hard place under the rope swing hung from a limb of the great tree in the front yard. Wilkes Booth Lincoln too heard the yells as he split kindling out in the wood house, but the little colored boy, being one of twelve, considered a yelling baby no novelty.

Aunt Cindy stopped rattling pots and pans and moved quietly around the kitchen. Every now and then she stood still in a listening attitude. The baby's cries grew even more vociferous. The old woman

filled the steaming kettle and moved a pot of Brunswick stew to the back of the stove, where it could "simper" without burning. She put in a stick of wood and turned the damper, shutting off the drafts. Then she took off her gingham apron and tied on a spotless white one. Unknotting her bright bandanna head handkerchief, she pulled down over her wrapped plaits a large, white, ruffled mob-cap. Then she stood and waited.

"Aunt Cindy! Aunt Cindy!" wailed the distracted Miss Minerva at last.

The smile that illumined Aunt Cindy's good-natured fat face would have "made a sunshine in a shady place." She gave a low chuckle of delight and hastened to her mistress.

"Praise Gawd!" she said as she waddled up the steps, "I done planned a Brunsick stew dinner with all the 'grejents in one

pot, taters, an' chicken, an' mattersies, an' butter beans, an' ok'a, an' inyons, wif jes' 'nough wet ter fill up the cracks. Brunsick stew kin cook itse'f, onct it air in the pot. This day I ain't no cook — I'm nuss."

With one hand the distracted mother was holding the squirming baby and with the other she was frantically endeavoring to turn over the leaves of a baby book opened on the chair by her side. There was a whole chapter given up to the bath, with pictures and diagrams showing the proper place for tub, toilet table, towel rack and other necessities; the proper method of handling the victim; the order of procedure; how deep the water must be and what temperature. There was a long list of don'ts, and another of do's. Miss Minerva was sure she had got them mixed. But no! She had followed out the diagrams and directions from the size and shape of the small-

est mouth-rag to the largest towel; from the boric acid eye-wash to the tepid bath.

When Aunt Cindy appeared tears were rolling down the harassed mother's face and splashing on the soapy baby, who did not at all relish such a shower, and loudly voiced her objections.

"A-u-u-nt Ci-hi-hin-dy!" sobbed Miss Minerva, "I-hi a-ham a-ha-fraid my-hi ba-ba-by i-his dy-hy-ing."

"Lawd love you, Miss 'Nerva, you needn't be oneasy 'bout no sich lively co'pse as that there chile a dying. What's the trouble, honey, what's the trouble?"

She took the screaming baby from its mother's grasp and wrapping it in a soft blanket she hugged it to her breast. Josephine immediately stopped crying.

"She wa'n't nothin' but scairt."

"She wasn't as scared as I was," declared the relieved mother.

"Well, now, how you 'spec' a po' lil baby not ter be scairt ef her own maw is scairt? S'posen us all weak an' sinful sinners should fin' out the good Gawd wa' scairt, don't you reckon we'd be terrorfied till all the white folks tu'ned black an' all the black folks tu'ned white? I jes' reckon a lil baby looks on its maw mos' as we looks on Gawd. Lil Josemphine knowed you wa' oneasy. That's what fur she wa' a carryin' on so."

"Would you mind washing her, Aunt Cindy, just this once?" was Miss Minerva's meek request, not knowing that the old woman had been longing for a month to hold the little creature as she was holding it now and to be allowed to perform services hitherto entrusted only to the trained nurse.

Down in the yard the game of knucks lagged. Billy was plainly distrait. The

crying of his baby cousin made him nervous. Jimmy, making the most of his adversary's indifference, won the right to shoot at Billy's knuckles and gleefully took advantage of it.

"You're all time playing knucks as bum as a girl!" declared Jimmy scornfully. Billy, usually being the victor in the game, smiled indifferently.

"I wonder what's the matter with the baby," he said anxiously.

"I reckon Miss Minerva's beatin' it. She might be killin' it. Miss Minerva is all the time beatin' her babies mos' to death."

"No sech thing! Aunt Minerva ain't never beat me since I was born." Billy never allowed anyone to malign his aunt. She had her peculiarities he knew, but they were not for outsiders to remark on.

"I never said she did. You ain't Miss

Minerva's baby, is you? I reckon Miss Minerva's gonter starve that little baby to death. I heard my mamma an' Mrs. Black an' Mrs. Hamilton a talkin' to Miss Cecilia about it an' they say Miss Minerva is gonter bring it up on a baby book an' they say book babies don't never do well. I sho' would hate to git nothin' to eat but a book. Miss Cecilia 'splained it all to me 'bout babies' eatin' books when the preacher read that piece in the Bible, in that part 'bout yo' relations, 'bout the little book that was bitter in yo' belly but tasted sweet in yo' mouth. I asked my mamma what he meant an' she said she wisht the preacher would skip all such ugly words he comed to in the Bible."

"I ain't seed Aunt Cindy cookin' nothin' for the baby yet, but I never thought it was because she was eatin' books. She sho' do keep plump on 'em," declared Billy in-

credulously. Jimmy insisted and repeated glibly the conversation of his mother and the neighbors.

When his playmate left Billy crept up to his aunt's room. The baby was washed and dressed and peacefully sleeping in her crib. Miss Minerva was writing a letter and Aunt Cindy was moving softly around, putting things to rights, emptying bath water and picking up the many towels and wash cloths and soiled baby clothes.

"Aunt Cindy, is the baby done washed?" he whispered.

"Yes, honey!"

"Is she et nothin'?"

Aunt Cindy pointed scornfully at the book which Miss Minerva had been consulting during the baby's strenuous ablutions. It was still on the chair. "The book calls it eatin', an' Miss 'Nerva she calls it eatin', but ter my min' 'tain't

nothin' 'tall. You wait till we gits that there baby down in the kitchen, honey. I betcher a sop er pot licker 'll make her smack her lips."

Billy picked up the book and looked curiously at it. He remembered his goat had taken pleasure and perhaps received nourishment from devouring books and papers. Could his baby sister (he thought of Josephine as a sister), could she be a kind of goat? He remembered what Jimmy had said about the book's being sweet to taste but bitter subsequently. He stuck out his tongue and gave a tentative lick to the cover. It offered no attractions. Surely Jimmy and Aunt Cindy were just fooling him.

It was a neat little brown book with the title stamped in plain letters on the back. One winter of schooling had taught Billy to read simple words. Anything he could

not read at sight he had learned to sound. With a voice trembling with emotion he read the title:

"A Book for the Care and Feeding of Infants"

Poor little Josephine! He remembered having heard someone say that Major Estes simply devoured books. The words came back to him as he stood there balancing the baby book in his hands.

"I reckon she done took her nature after the Major," he decided, "but it's mighty po' eatin' to my min'."

CHAPTER II

AUNT CINDY SPEAKS UP

MISS Minerva was determined that her baby should not be spoiled.

"Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it," she quoted. "That is what the wise King Solomon said."

"Aunt Minerva, wasn't Solomon the son of David?" asked Billy.

"Yes, my dear," answered Miss Minerva with an approving glance at her nephew. It was a great comfort to her that her Bible teaching was bearing fruit. Long had she labored with Billy.

"Well, Aunt Minerva, do you reckon King David brung up his little boy to have forty 'leven wives?"

The Major, who was pretending to read the paper but who was in reality listening to the conversation between his wife and Billy, looked slyly over the top of the printed sheet to see what answer his Minerva would make to Billy's query.

"Manners and customs were different in those days," she said primly. The Major had been sure that would be her answer and his eyes twinkled. Miss Minerva held all Bible characters sacred and was wont to excuse their evil ways. "Besides, Billy, he had only four hundred."

"Well, forty 'leven is the way the po'try goes. I learned a pretty verse 'bout David and Solomon, Aunt Minerva. Do you want me to 'cite it? Tom Collins learned it to me."

"Taught it to you?"

"Yessum! I thought teachers taught an' boys learned. That's what you been

a tellin' me. This is the way the verse goes:

'King Solomon an' King David,
With their forty 'leven wives,
Raised cain in ol' Jerusalem,
An' lived ongawdly lives —

But when ol' age comed on apace
With all its many qua'ms,
King Solomon took to Proverbs,
An' King David took to Psa'ms.'"

Miss Minerva was plainly shocked, not only at Billy's poetry but at the Major's accompanying laughter.

"I reckon all them wives was right fond of cucumbers, don't you, Aunt Minerva?"

"Cucumbers? I know nothing of the tastes of the wives of Solomon."

"Well, besides all them forty 'leven — I mean four hundred wives — he had 'bout seven million cucumber vines."

"Study your lessons!" was Miss Minerva's answer to her nephew's search for knowledge.

"Do you reckon he made the wives cultivate the cucumber vines?"

Miss Minerva refused to reply, so Billy took up his book, but a wink the Major gave him around the edge of his paper put heart in him to pursue the subject another time.

Miss Minerva's proverb concerning the bringing up of a child had been called forth by a mild objection her husband had voiced to the baby's being allowed to cry herself to sleep. Josephine was now three months old. In spite of her mother's clock-like regularity in training her she seldom went to sleep without a protest. The trained nurse had said she must not be rocked to sleep, and the baby book said she must not be rocked to sleep but placed

in her bed and left, and the mother was determined to follow out these mandates. When she quoted Solomon the Major felt himself to be worsted in the argument and so retired to his paper. The baby had been crying for fifteen minutes, stopping for an instant every now and then as though listening to see if help were coming, and when she again met with disappointment vocalizing her wrongs with renewed vigor. Finally the wailing ceased and peace and quiet reigned.

Miss Minerva looked with triumph on the father of her babe. Just then Aunt Cindy entered bringing the basket of silver which each night was placed for safe keeping in her mistress's wardrobe. Aunt Cindy was plainly indignant. The baby had cried much longer than usual that evening and the sound of its wailing had been too much for the kind old woman. Miss Minerva's

attitude of triumph put the torch to her smoldering rage. She put down the

basket on the table and with arms akimbo she wagged her old head. The ends of her bandanna handkerchief stood up like

ears and Billy giggled to think how much she looked like an infuriated rabbit.

"Yes, she done gone ter sleep, plumb tuckered out, but 'tain't nothin' fer us alls ter be proudified over. She'd a drapt off in a minute if'n somebody had a helt her up clost an' hummed a lil chune. That there baby air got too much sense ter havter go er sleep all by herse'f. Whe'fo' she got ter be trained so much? What diffunce air it gonter make in two, three years' time when she won't set in yo' lap ter save yer — leastways not as much as you'd like ter have her settin'. You ain't a gittin' no fun out'n yo' baby an' you ain't a lettin' the Major git no fun. I know I is a actin' out er my place, an' a speakin' up out er my callin', but I's gonter say my say if I has ter quit yo' sarvice befo' sunup. If anything wa' ter happen ter that lil Josemphine you an' her pappy wouldn't have

nothin' ter 'member her by but jes' rules an' regerlations. 'Tain't nachel. Miss 'Nerva, 'tain't nachel!"

Miss Minerva tried to put in a word but the old woman was resolved to speak her mind fully.

"When you buries yo' baby you can jes' set an' hol' that measly lil book. You is helt it mo'n you has her an' you sets mo' sto' by it than you does yo' own nachel mother love. I ain't never seed a white 'ooman let a baby holler lak yo's does. I've seed niggers what air fo'ced ter go out ter wuck leave they babies ter yell theyse'fs ho'se, but they at leas' puts on nice tight belly ban's so they won't bus' theyse'fs open a screamin'; an' when they gits home they takes the babies in bed wif 'em an' loves 'em some.

"These new fangled mothers is the only ones on Gawd's green yearth what thruses

they young away from them, 'cept'n maybe feesh. They ain't no better'n imcubators ter my min'. What if'n you do spile her a teensy bit? You likes 'em better when they's a little bad. An' what's mo', Miss 'Nerva, the Major air that kinder pos'-pomed fambly man what it ain't safe ter hender too much. When the Major wants ter dandle his baby you'd bes' leave him do it."

Aunt Cindy stopped and waited a minute for the reprimand she was sure would be forthcoming, but her mistress said nothing. Her chin was trembling slightly and she kept her eyes to the sewing in her lap. Aunt Cindy bobbed a funny little curtsey and turned to leave the room. As she passed him, the Major, unseen by his wife, slipped a dollar bill into her hand.

Not a word was said for many minutes. Miss Minerva sat, thinking deeply. Could

she be wrong? Was she nothing but a human incubator? Was she trusting too much to a book and not enough to her own instinct? Her feelings prompted her to do all the things Aunt Cindy blamed her for not doing. Perhaps her baby was not to be brought up by rule. After three months of training it still cried instead of going to sleep as the book said it should. Could it be that the little creature longed to be kissed and cuddled as much as she longed to kiss and cuddle it? The book had said kissing was unsanitary, so Josephine had never been kissed. Hugging retarded development, so Josephine had never been cuddled.

Billy was sorry for his aunt. He had watched her face during Aunt Cindy's outburst and had seen the varied expressions which passed over it, first astonishment, then indignation, then doubt, and now

regret was pictured there. Aunt Minerva was sorry, he was sure, sorry for herself and the Major because their baby might die before they hugged it; and sorry for the little baby because she had so much sense she wasn't intended to go to sleep all by herself.

Billy's mind had been relieved some weeks before as to the baby's having the proper nourishment. Dr. Sanford had openly prescribed a bottle for the child and now bottles were much in evidence, while Aunt Minerva with her own hands prepared barley water and milk.

Billy was sure his aunt was wrong, but she was sure she was right. How could it be right to let a little baby cry? How could she think it was right? But then Aunt Minerva had strange notions of right and wrong. She thought it was right to make a little boy go to bed in the day time

just because he forgot and did something that she considered naughty. Lots of times the little boy would not know it was naughty and Aunt Cindy would think it was all right for white boys to do it, but wrong for colored boys.

Aunt Cindy and Aunt Minerva often did not think the same way. When they disagreed on what Billy considered a fundamental, he would take the question to the Major. The Major was a great comfort. He would look on all sides and turn a thing upside-down and look on the bottom before he decided and then when he gave his opinion it was always with a twinkle in his kind eyes. Aunt Minerva was kind, very kind, but she was so afraid of boys growing up to be men. As for Aunt Cindy, she was as good as gold and lenient to a fault, but Billy did wish she wouldn't expect Wilkes Booth Lincoln to be so per-

fect, picking on him all the time and glossing over Billy's faults.

Billy was sorry for his aunt because he felt she had got the worst of the argument. He always felt sorry for the under-dog and when he saw the Major slip the bill to Aunt Cindy he knew that she and the Master were banded together against poor Aunt Minerva.

"It would be easier if she'd jes' 'fess up," he said to himself. "But Aunt Minerva'll never do that. That's the onlies' big thing I've got aginst her, she won't never 'fess up she is wrong, Aunt Minerva won't. But I wisht she would."

Josephine was never a very good night sleeper, although she was a very healthy baby. Now, as though divining that she had been under discussion and was still in the mind of all the members of her family, she opened her eyes and then her mouth and

sent forth a little sleepy wail. Miss Minerva dropped her sewing and listened. The Major put down his paper as though waiting for something to happen. Billy looked with all his eyes.

"Joseph, suppose you go get the baby and bring her here by the fire. Perhaps she would like to toast her — her tootsie-wootsies a little."

The beaming Major kept the wailing infant waiting an instant while he bestowed a kiss on his wife's smiling countenance.

"Tootsie-wootsies, tootsie-wootsies!" he chuckled to himself as he went for the baby. "My Minerva talking baby talk!"

CHAPTER III

DARE, DARE, DOUBLE DARE!

ILLY, is Miss Minerva's baby got over the limbernecks yet?" asked Lina Hamilton.

"She ain't never had 'em!" said Billy with some indignation. "Josephine ain't any more of a chicken than Aunt Minerva is a hen."

"I mean the wobbly-heads, silly, the way all babies are until they can hold up their heads so they won't roll off if you don't hold 'em on," explained Lina. "'Tain't jest exzactly a disease but what Dr. Sanford calls consangenitability."

"Wow!" cried Jimmy, holding on to his jaw, "Wa'n't that a crackerjack, now? I tell you, Billy, if Lina keeps on a usin' such big words her jaw'll git so strong she

kin go in a show an' lif' up weights with her teeth."

"You can go in as the fat boy and she can lif' up you," giggled Frances Black, coming to the defense of her sex.

"You all time buttin' in, Frances Black. Nobody was talkin' to you," said Jimmy wincing under punishment.

"I wasn't talkin' to anybody, either," retorted Frances, witheringly. "You ain't anybody."

Jimmy, having learned from long experience that it was fatal to his masculine superiority to engage in a battle of wits with Frances, stuck his hands in his pockets, turned his back and began to whistle.

"Gee, folks, le's don't git to fussin'! 'Tain't no use," begged Billy. "Here it is Saturday, with no lessons or nothin' to worry with but jes' a whole day to have fun in. Fussin' ain't no fun. Me'n Wilkes

Booth Lincoln ain't fussed none since we's born."

"Sho' we ain't!" put in the little colored boy with his soft voice. "Billy don't never fuss nohow, an' if I'd try it Aunt Cindy'd w'ar me out."

"It's sech a bully day with the sun a shinin' an' the wind a blowin' an' the air that clear. Makes me feel kinder like I did one time when I et too much puddin' sauce. Le's think up some game what'll be nice for all of us — an' le's play it all day an' play it true," continued Billy the peace-maker and peace-lover.

The children had come together in their favorite spot under the big beech tree in Miss Minerva's front yard. Lina Hamilton and Frances Black were as intimate as ever with Billy and Jimmy. Many and violent were the altercations, but as often as they fell out, they made up and suc-

ceeded in living together in what Lina called "open amity."

When a game could be agreed upon that appealed to all irrespective of sex or race then a good time was assured. It must not be too girlish for the boys or too rough for the girls, and a part must be found to suit the gentle little colored boy, who was included in the games if Aunt Cindy would let him alone long enough and not make him come split kindling or do other chores. What was the game to be on this wonderful Saturday with the sun shining and the wind blowing and the air so invigorating that it seemed like wine to Billy, who was as sensitive to weather as a barometer?

"Le's play house," suggested Lina.

"House nothin! You all time wantin' to play sech sissy games," stormed Jimmy. "If you play house I'm a gonter play I done et mo' puddin' sauce than Billy done

that time, an' I'm gonter be the popper, an' I'm a gonter come home an' bus' up all the furnisher, an' I'm gonter throw the chilluns out the winder like Punch an' Judy — "

The little girls clasped their dolls to their beating hearts

"Not my Gladys Maud!" protested Frances.

"Not my Muriel!" screamed Lina as Jimmy made a pass as though trying to get his wicked paternal hands on the infant.

"Please le's don' play no house," begged Wilkes Booth Lincoln. "If'n you alls plays house, I'll jis' go split kindlin' 'nough fer nex' week an' be done wif it an ax Aunt Cindy ter gib me mo' wuck ter do. 'Twon't be nothin' ter the wuck I'll hab ter do a playin' house. They ain't no diffunce 'tween playin' you are wuckin' an jes' wuckin'."

Wilkes Booth Lincoln was always cast to play the part of man-of-all-work in the house-keeping games and no doubt being general factotum for four children who were bent on "playing true" kept the little fellow quite as busy as trying to satisfy the exacting Aunt Cindy.

"Le's play circus," suggested Billy, "Then the pony kin play too. Brownie loves to play."

"We played circus last Saturday," objected Frances. "And my mamma says I mustn't ride bare back 'till I learn how — but I've got the grandes' scheme you all ever heard!"

Frances's schemes usually meant something interesting and original and so the children eagerly demanded her plan.

"Le's play gypsy! Le's get a sheet an' put it on the pony cart 'zactly like gypsy wagons. An' le's get our dishes an' fryin'

pans an' things — an' le's take Jimmy's Injun tent — an — "

Frances paused for breath and Lina put in her word:

"An' le's take Muriel an' Gladys Maud — an' le's dress up in bright scarfts an' sashes with earrings an' beads with banana han'k'chiefs on our heads — "

"Listen to ol' Lina! All time talkin' 'bout her silly ol' doll baby an' wantin' to wear earrin's," scoffed Jimmy. "When I play gypsy, I'm gonter be a stealer. Gypsies is all time stealin' things."

"One time some gypsums comed down by de plantashum an' done stoled a lil white baby an' wa' a licksplittin' away as fas' as dey hosses could run, but dey got cot up wif down by de landin'," said Wilkes Booth Lincoln.

The little white children were silent. They looked guiltily into each other's eyes.

A thought seemed to have come to the four simultaneously. Lina spoke:

"Did you say Miss Minerva's baby is got over the limbernecks, Billy?"

"She sho' is. Little Josephine c'n hol' up her head as good as you c'n," replied Billy proudly.

"When does she take her nap?" asked Frances with her ever ready executive ability coming to the fore.

"She's 'sleep now. I jes' heard her stop cryin'. Aunt Minerva was trainin' her to-day. She done stopped training her all the time," said Billy. "Jes' every now an' then."

"How long do the kid sleep?" asked Jimmy.

"Two three hours!"

"I choose to be the stealer. I'm all time the bestes' stealer they is," boasted Jimmy. "I betcher I kin steal Miss Minerva's baby

an' bring her back befo' Miss Minerva Major knows she's gone."

"But you can't carry a baby at the proper elevation," objected Lina.

"Who can't? You all time thinkin' yo're the only person what kin carry kids. Gimme Muriel an' I'll show you!" Jimmy grabbed the helpless doll from the arms of her little mother and galloped off. "Say, this ain't the proper way?" he shouted.

Poor Muriel had to submit to being held head downward while Jimmy teased Lina, who was almost weeping.

"Aw, Jimmy, you make me tired!" put in Billy. "Gypsies don't carry on that a-way. Now le's form a gypsy band an' git our wagon fixed up an' start to playin'."

"If that there Jimmy is so peart at stealin' he mought try his han' on one er his maw's sheets," suggested Wilkes Booth Lincoln with a solemn wink at Billy.

"Jimmy's just bluffin'," declared Lina.

"I dare an' double dare you, Jimmy Garner," put in Frances quickly.

The first one to get in a dare had a decided advantage over the one dared. In the ethics of childhood it is a disgrace not to take a dare. It was always an intense irritation to Jimmy that Frances had such a ready tongue and could always get in a dare while he was still thinking about it. He had fully intended to dare Billy to steal a sheet and here Frances had darted in and spoiled things.

"You all time so mean, Frances Black! They ain't anybody in the world so mean as you. My mamma is mos' out of sheets. I jes' done hear her say she mus' try to save up an' buy some," said Jimmy with a virtuously aggrieved air. "'Sides my mamma is the bigges' spanker they is," he added, reflectively.

"Tell her to commonize on hair brushes she wears out a spankin' you an' buy some sheets," giggled Lina.

"Dare! Dare! Double dare!" cried Frances. "Take a dare! Take a dare! Steal a copper cent off a dead man's eye!"

What stealing a copper cent off a dead man's eye involved none of the children knew, but they did know that it was the acme of insult and one who was thus taunted must take up the dare or be branded as a coward. Jimmy stuck out his tongue at his adversary, then reluctantly squeezed his fat little person through the crack made by a loose paling in the fence dividing the Garner's front yard from that of Mrs. Joseph Estes, nee Miss Minerva. Honor demanded that he steal something!

Sarah Jane had just taken out of the tub and hung on the line what she designated as her "pussonal wash." It had rather a

streaky look, for one of her best red stockings had in some mysterious manner found its way into the wash-boiler. That mishap had not hurt the stocking in the least or diminished its glory. It hung by its mate in conscious gorgeousness, even slightly puffed up as though proud of the generosity that had caused it to lend of its color to all the other clothes. The pair of unbleached cotton sheets and the huge nightgown and chemise seemed pale reflections of a pink sunset.

Aunt Cindy could see the Garners' clothes line over the evergreen hedge that was supposed to lend privacy to Miss Minerva's back yard. Every Saturday she viewed Sarah Jane's wash with grumbling disapproval. On that particular Saturday she looked with disdain on the latest color effect. Pink sunsets were for the sky, not nightgowns.

"Hump! 'Tain't nobody but lazy folks what wash of a Sat'day. Now if'n it wa' nex' week's wash it wouldn' be so bad. It air allus good ter be befo' han', but Sarah Jane needn' tell me — that wash ain't eben las' week's wash; it air mo'n likely t' be week befo' las'. She air a fool fer luck, though, 'cause it air sho' some fine dryin' day."

Had the hedge not been so thick Aunt Cindy could have seen Jimmy as he crawled along the ground intent on his plundering expedition. After all he was spared the plundering of his mother's linen press, since Sarah Jane had so recklessly put temptation in his way. Far better to steal a sheet from Sarah Jane than have to take from a girl the taunt that he would steal a copper cent off a dead man's eye.

"Well, if that don't beat all!" exclaimed Aunt Cindy. "I could a swo' I

seed two sheets an' a pair er red stockin's a hangin' on that there line an' now th' ain't but one sheet an' one stockin'. I mus' a been seein' double."

CHAPTER IV

THE GYPSIEST THING OF ALL

JIMMY presented such a comical figure as he squirmed through the loose paling after his marauding expedition that the gypsy band laughed aloud. Indoors, Miss Minerva, who was putting on her hat preparatory to going to market, smiled in the mirror as the sound floated up to her. After all, she thought, it was pleasant to have happy children playing about the house. They were good children, too, at least they had been good lately. She determined to bring them a treat from market.

"Josephine is asleep, Aunt Cindy," she said as she stopped in the kitchen for a moment. "You need not go to her, even

if she cries. She must learn to behave herself."

"All right, ma'am! I hears yer," said Aunt Cindy, and then added to herself, as Miss Minerva went out the front door: "But I don't heed yer. Ketch me a lettin' a lil' baby cry! Miss 'Nerva am some better than she wa' but she ain't ter say sanctified jes' yet."

The thing that had made the children laugh so merrily was that Jimmy had pulled Sarah Jane's red stocking on over his bristling black head, making an excellent and effective gypsy cap.

"While I was about it I hiked a piece of a box of candy too," panted the triumphant robber. "Mamma didn't even bother to hide it from me, 'cause it tain't nothin' but put-backs: jes' them ol' pink an' blue an' yaller an' green pieces what taste like face powder an' tooth paste an' 'fumery an'

paregoric. Grown folks is been a nibblin' on mos' of 'em. That's the reason I call 'em put-backs. I thought maybe Wilkes Booth Lincoln would like 'em," he added generously.

"I sho' would. I ain't ter say 'ticular," said the little colored boy gratefully.

"Aunt Minerva's gone to market an' Aunt Cindy is making limin 'rangs for Sunday dinner. We's got time to get the gypsy wagon ready an' the pony hitched up an' everything if we jes' hurries," said Billy. "Us boys will do the hitchin' an' fix the sheet on while you girls dress up an' git the fryin' pans an' dishes."

"You might steal some eats too, while you are about it," suggested Jimmy.

"Ladies don't steal," declared Lina virtuously.

"You ain't playin' lady, silly! You're playin' gypsy. You an' Frances all time

'spectin' other folks to do all the dirty work. It ain't sho 'nough stealin'. It's jes' playin' stealin'. Ain't we gonter take back all the things we took?"

"Y'ain't gonter take back that there big green candy what yo' maw done left, 'cause I done et it up," Wilkes Booth Lincoln assured him with satisfaction.

"I'll steal something," said Frances stoutly. "If Lina is too ladylike to steal she'll be too ladylike to eat stolen things I reckon."

"I'll eat the things if you call it borrowing," Lina hastened to assure her. "I'll borrow some too. I'll borrow some tea cakes out of the jar and some chops out of the 'frigerator. My mamma wouldn't mind my borrowing."

The little girls were off and back in a jiffy. They had managed to "borrow" a great variety of food and many bright

colored ribbons and scarves and table covers. Saturday morning was a good time for "borrowing," as all mothers made it a habit to go to market at that time and cooks were generally busy with their extra baking for Sunday. The doll dishes and cooking utensils were also brought over and stored in the back of the pony cart which the boys had with the help of Sarah Jane's sheet transformed into a covered gypsy wagon.

"Ain't it grand?" cried Billy, viewing their handiwork with delight, his eyes round with excitement. The sheet had been thrown over the little fringed canopy top and then brought down and tied at the four corners. Brownie, the pony, was gaily decorated with bits of ribbon.

"Yes, it's grand enough but you an' Wilkes Booth Lincoln ain't stealed nothin' yet," declared Jimmy. "You all time let-

tin' other folks do all the work mos' as bad as Lina an' Frances."

"I'm gonter steal the baby. I reckon that's bein' as bad as you, Jimmy Garner. But I ain't gonter let Wilkes Booth Lincoln steal nothin'. If he does it white folks might not call it borrowin' the way they will for us. Wilkes Booth Lincoln ain't never stealed anything since him an' me was born an' I ain't gonter let nobody put it on him now."

That much was settled. When Billy put his foot down in regard to his little colored friend the children knew there was no use in making objections to his ruling. It was decided, however, that all of the four white children were to go together to steal the baby.

"That will be the gypsiest thing of all," said Lina, who looked like a veritable Bohemian Girl with her mother's Roman

scarf wrapped around her many times and tied on the side, with a cretonne spool bag serving as a jaunty cap.

All of them were dressed to suit the parts. Lina was mistress of the wardrobe, being particularly clever at dressing up and converting assorted rags into costumes.

The gypsy band crept through the parlor window and up the steps to where Josephine lay sweetly sleeping in her crib. Far away, in the kitchen, Aunt Cindy, beating the eggs for the meringue, was singing in time to the egg-beater, and her voice came faintly to the four kidnappers:

"Roll, Jordan, roll! Roll, Jordan, roll!
I want ter go ter Heaben whin I die
Jes' ter hèar ol' Jordan roll!

Oh, brothers, you ought to er been there,
Yes, my Lord! A sittin' in the Kingdom,
Ter hear ol' Jordan roll."

So busy was she hearing Jordan roll that she did not hear fat little Jimmy roll down the steps in his eagerness to reach the cart first and get on the front seat. If it had not been for Lina's masterly treatment of Jimmy he would have had the baby in his arms when he took the tumble. He had insisted upon being the one to carry the stolen child but this Lina would not permit.

"Now, who knows best?" she demanded triumphantly when they were safely seated in the cart. "Miss Minerva ought to be grateful to me forever and ever amen 'cause I saved her baby's life."

"Oh, you all time so stuck on yo'self. If I had had that baby in my arms I could er balanced myself and wouldn't a fell. I sho' did bump my knee." A large hole in Jimmy's stocking gave evidence to this and his face was still red from the effort he had made to keep back the tears.

"Well, don't make so much noise or you'll wake the baby," admonished Frances. "Ain't she cute and can't Lina hold her good? She ain't woken up a mite an' is snuggled down in Lina's arms jes' like she was Muriel."

A cluck from Billy and Brownie was off! Billy deemed it wisest to do the driving himself. It was all very well to borrow Aunt Minerva's baby but he was going to see to it that they got back without any accidents, which he could not guarantee if Jimmy held the reins.

"Where shall we camp?" he asked.

"In the school yard," suggested Frances. "It would be the safest place 'cause nobody never would look for children near school on Saturday. They won't even be the janitor there 'cause he cleaned up with a lick an' a promise befo' he went home Friday."

The wisdom of Frances' suggestion being recognized and applauded, Billy directed his gentle steed toward the school house. The little vehicle might easily have passed for one of the country trading carts come to town for the Saturday market. Unobserved they entered the school yard through the broad back gate. The gate was closed behind them and the high board fence concealed the gypsy camp from the outside world.

"I reckon Wilkes Booth Lincoln had better make the fire," suggested Billy. "Aunt Cindy says she will give it to him that he sho' kin build the burnin'es' fire she ever see."

"Well, he c'n make the fire, but I bid to be the one to light it," insisted Jimmy. "I'm the bestes' person to strike matches they is."

"Pooh! You're the braggin'es' person

they is," mimicked Frances. "I bet I can strike one just as well as you can."

"I betcher can't. No girl can't." Doubling up his fat little leg, Jimmy gave an exhibition of match striking that brought an "Oh!" of admiration from both girls and Frances was forced to confess that she could not equal Jimmy's skill, at least until she became emancipated sufficiently to don male attire.

Some broken packing boxes piled up by the gate for the ash man to cart away gave plenty of wood for Wilkes Booth Lincoln to build a fire with the help of some excelsior as a starter. The campfire was soon merrily crackling. The tiny frying pan was put on and one chop placed therein, where it smoked bravely and then caught fire, but the blaze was soon blown out and another chop offered up until six had been cooked.

"There aren't but five of us, but I brought all six," said Lina, "because I knew one chop wouldn't do my mother any good."

"Sho'! I can eat two as easy as shootin'," declared Jimmy.

"There are six of us countin' Josephine," said Billy. "Aunt Cindy says she

is plenty ol' 'nough to gnaw a bone if I eat the meat off it first."

"Yes, an' I think Billy ought to be the one to eat it off for his own cousin what is mos' a sister," said Frances emphatically. "What germs she catches will be in the family an' it won't make so much diffunce."

It had taken much time to cook those chops and the first one was cold before the last was declared done, but that made no difference to the hungry children. Hands were scorched and eyes were full of smoke, but they agreed that playing gypsy was the very best game they had ever played and that those particular chops were the very best chops they had ever tasted. No one missed the salt, no one minded the smoky taste or the fact that the edges of the chops were burnt and the middle almost raw.

The baby opened her eyes and looked

gravely on while the kidnappers devoured their food. Her inclination was to cry, as was her custom when she awakened, but finding herself closely held in somebody's arms she decided that crying was useless. She had been awake several minutes before the children were aware of it. Lina had her tightly hugged in her lap, one hand under her head that she feared might still be a little wobbly, the other clutching the charred chop.

"Look, she is awake!" cried the little mother. "Oh, um sweetums, ittles' cutums!"

Josephine crowed delightedly. She did not know what to make of this new world on which she had opened her eyes but it was a very charming world and she meant to show her approval.

"Hurry up, Billy, and gnaw her chop," urged Lina. "I know she is hungry."

If when babies grow up they could remember their first bones I am sure they would declare unanimously that no sensation in after life was so delightful as that first taste of meat. Man is an omnivorous animal, but from the way a little baby takes to a bone one might infer he was strictly carnivorous. Billy did his part as rapidly as possible, feeling his importance the while.

"Aw, leave her a little! Don't be sech a greedy-gut," admonished Jimmy.

Josephine held out her little hands for this new kind of toy. Up to this time her rattle had been sterilized with great care by her solicitous mother, sterilized until there was no taste left in it. What was this? A rattle that was soundless, but had a flavor much more delectable than even milk with barley water?

"Gee! Don't she jes' love it though?"

cried Billy delightedly. "Aunt Cindy's been a sayin' she ought to have a bone for the longes' time. Are you sho' she's warm enough, Lina? She'll git the colic if her feets git col'."

"Um 'ittle tootsies is warm as toast," answered Lina, wrapping her mother's striped shawl more closely around her charge. "But maybe Wilkes Booth Lincoln had better make the fire a little hotter."

"Le's put this barrel on it," suggested Jimmy. "It's full of ol' comp'sitions an' papers that'll sho' enough make a blaze."

Up to this time the fire maker had kept the blaze to a conservative size, but when Jimmy rolled the barrel of old school papers and dumped it on the glowing brands it flared up in a moment in real Christmas style.

"Now that's somethin' like! I'm the bossest fire maker in this whole town."

"You'll be a settin' the fince on fiah, nixt," cautioned Wilkes Booth Lincoln, "an' thin you'll be the bosses' runner they is."

"Dong! Dong!" a bell sounded far down the street.

"There's fire bells!" shouted Jimmy. "Everybody be still an' les' see where it is."

"You are making all the noise," declared Frances.

"Shhh!" warned Jimmy.

"Dong! Dong!— Dong! Dong" pealed the bell.

"Two! Two! Two! Two-twenty-two! Why it's the school house! That's the number we have the fire drill by!" shouted Billy. "Gee, ain't I glad I'm here to see it!"

CHAPTER V

A DOUBLE ALARM

THE housewives were returning from market. On their countenances one might behold the contented expression usual with women conscious of their unselfish virtue. Had they not spent the morning paying out money for the nourishment of their families rather than the adornment of their own persons? Many of them were laden with parcels, the exigencies of housekeeping making it impossible to wait for the belated Saturday deliveries.

"I simply have to carry home my dinner meat on Saturday," said Mrs. Black, in apology for the unmistakable butcher's bundle she was holding gingerly.

"I always market for Saturday on Fri-

day," said Mrs. Hamilton, with that conscious superiority to which Jimmy Garner objected so strenuously in Lina, her daughter. "I bought rib chops yesterday."

Poor Mrs. Hamilton, little did she know who was dining off those chops!

"I just leave Saturday's dinner to the resourcefulness of Sarah Jane," declared pretty little Mrs. Garner as she tripped along by the side of her neighbors.

Miss Minerva, who was carrying a bulging bag of bananas, sniffed disdainfully in somewhat her pre-nuptial manner. Miss Minerva had grown much more courteous since she became Mrs. Major, but there were times when she reverted to her native state. The prettiness and general shiftlessness of Mrs. Garner usually brought out in her what Jimmy called her Missminervaishness.

"This is candy," Mrs. Garner con-

tinued, displaying a large neatly wrapped box. "James has made a habit of bringing me home candy every Saturday since we were married, but he takes no pains at all in selecting it — just grabs one of those boxes all tied up, puts down his dollar and goes out. Half of it is not fit to eat. I stood it as long as I could; now I make him give me the money and let me buy my own candy. Not so much romance, but much better candy. Nobody wants the awful pink and green pieces in those ready packed boxes, not even Jimmy."

"The children have been very good lately," put in the gentle voice of Mrs. Maurice Richmond, the beloved Miss Cecilia. "I believe I have never seen such good children. They play together so happily. They are perfect dears in my Sunday School class. Do you know, Mrs. Garner, I believe Jimmy will be a preacher

when he grows up? He takes so much interest in Bible stories."

Mrs. Garner smiled at the thought. She could not visualize her chubby, mischievous little son as adorning a pulpit.

"Heavens, Cecilia! What a terrible prophecy. It would be so uncomfortable to have a preacher in the family."

Her neighbors laughed. Even Miss Minerva saw the humor in the situation: fat, naughty little Jimmy Garner turning preacher to the dumfounding of his pretty, frivolous mother. Now Billy would make a lovely preacher with his sweet, angelic eyes and his halo of curls, and his pious aunt would like nothing better than having a preacher in the family.

The ladies bade one another good-morning and turned in their respective gates.

"Has the baby cried?" Miss Minerva asked Aunt Cindy as she put down her

heavy bag of bananas on the kitchen table.

"No'm! She ain't cheeped. I ain't done had no 'ruptions this whole mornin'. My ham air boiled an' sugared an' stuck full er cloves an' browned ter a queen's tas'e. I done cut out an' baked a jar full er cookies; an' jes' look at that there row er limin 'rangs! I don't know what's become er Billy. He's usually a hangin' 'roun' of a Sat'day same as a hawg ter lick de batter bowl."

Miss Minerva expressed her approval of the ham and the cookies and the lemon meringue pies. Having a light hand at pastry herself she could appreciate the talent in another and Aunt Cindy's pies were wonderful to behold — and eat.

"I have brought some bananas to the children, because they have been so good lately. You say you don't know where they are?" asked the mistress.

"I take notice the stable do' is wide open so I reckon they is gone fer a spin. They'll be back 'fo' long. I done foun' out that chillunses stomichs keeps putty good time an' whin the clock pints ter dinner time mos' ginerally they pints they noses to'ds home."

Miss Minerva tiptoed upstairs. The baby was sleeping a long time, much longer than usual, but then she had had to fight to get to sleep and no doubt was worn out, poor little thing! Of course the book said a baby must be allowed to sleep only a certain time and must be roused for nourishment, etc., etc., but on the other hand, Aunt Cindy avowed it was the worst luck in the world to wake a baby. The anxious mother decided to give Aunt Cindy's theory a trial and to let Josephine sleep until she awakened naturally.

She moved quietly around putting away

her wrap and hat. The air that Billy had described as making him feel as though he had eaten too much pudding sauce had had its effect on his aunt also. She was happy and at peace with the world. She noted with a thrill as she peeped in the mirror that her color was good and she was taking on a little flesh. She fluffed up her hair the way her husband liked to see it and smiled at herself almost gaily. Then she crept softly to the crib to gaze with adoration on the sleeping babe.

Her child was not there — the crib was empty!

Frantically she shook the covers; she looked under the crib; she searched the wardrobe; wildly she opened the bureau drawer, throwing the contents about, for the remembrance came to her of the time years ago when in a fit of abstraction she had washed potatoes and put them in the

kitchen table drawer instead of the oven. Could she have mislaid her baby? Never! Besides on the dainty, lace-trimmed, pink-lined pillow was the imprint of her darling's head. For a moment Miss Minerva was frantic, then the thought came: Aunt Cindy had played a joke on her! She had the baby down stairs all the time!

"Aunt Cindy! Aunt Cindy!" she called, "You can just bring little Josephine up now."

"Ma'am?" came back from below. "Bring what up?"

"The baby — Josephine!"

"I ain't brung no baby down. I done tol' you she ain't stirred sence you lef'."

Miss Minerva screamed wildly once, then dashed down the steps.

At the same moment a loud bellow was heard from Mrs. Garner's back yard. Sarah Jane had just become aware of the fact

that one of her stockings and one of her sheets were missing.

"Fo' Gawd, I'm a gonter run 'um down if it takes me all the res' er my life!" she cried. "Dirty, low down sneak thieves a comin' in the yard an' stealin' my things what I done spent the mawnin' a washin'. I'll get that wo'thless nigger!"

Between her mistress's scream and her neighbor's bellow Aunt Cindy was almost distracted.

"Phome fer the perlice! Phome fer the perlice!" cried Sarah Jane.

"Get the Major! Get the police! Get the doctor!" begged Miss Minerva. In her distracted mind she felt that the doctor would be needed sooner or later and they had best have him handy.

At that moment the Major came driving up in his stylish little red-wheeled buggy. He stopped to count the fire bells which

rang out loud and clear. Dong dong! Dong dong! Dong dong!

"Two-twenty-two," he counted, "Why! that's the school house. Minerva!" he called, "I'll be right back, but I am going to the fire first."

The Major was a boyish man who would never be entirely grown up no matter what his age. He knew all the fire alarm numbers and he always went to the fires.

"Oh, Joseph!" screamed Miss Minerva, running out on the front porch looking very like a distracted hen whose one chicken had disappeared. "The baby — the baby —"

"Well, what's the matter with the baby?" he asked quickly, for good fires wait for no man.

"She's gone —"

"Gone? Where?"

"I don't know! Aunt Cindy —"

"I done what you said, an' lef' her whar

you put her! I ain't stirred from this hyar house an' th' ain't nobody a comed in it as I knows on."

"An' my sheet an one er my bes' Sunday stockin's air gone too," chimed in Sarah Jane, trying to squeeze through the loose paling where Jimmy made his exits and entrances. She stuck fast, however, and, half way through, she poured out imprecations on the unknown thief till breath failed her.

Instantly the excitement spread down the quiet street. Mrs. Hamilton came hurriedly from her house calling excitedly to her neighbors:

"Some thief has been in my house and has stolen my lamb chops! Lovely French chops they were too — six of them! And my silk Roman shawl — that couldn't be matched in this country!"

Mrs. Black then made her appearance.

She too reported losses in the shape of a whole jar of cookies; and her work bag, silver thimble and all; also a pineapple cheese and a whole pound of butter.

"Where are the children?" asked the Major, who alone remained calm, undisturbed by the distracted housewives.

"They are off in the pony cart, we think," sobbed Miss Minerva. "But where *is* my baby?"

"Well, get in here with me and we will go find them," suggested the Major. "Maybe they can clear up the mystery."

Hatless and coatless, the frantic mother climbed in beside her imperturbable husband and away they drove. In their wake trailed Sarah Jane, Benny Dick, her young son, running along behind her like a colt after the mare, and after them, Mrs. Hamilton, Mrs. Black and Mrs. Garner, with Aunt Cindy bringing up the rear.

The Major drove towards the school house, which was the objective of half the town. The news had spread that the

school house was burning and old and young flocked to the fire. There was a rattle of wheels and the fire engines swung around the corner. Then came the hook-and-ladder with its gallant crew. They were going at top speed but the Major's little horse was more than a match for them

and he kept the lead, Miss Minerva holding on for dear life, her hair fluffy enough now to suit the most exacting of husbands.

He turned off in the alley, having caught a glimpse of the diminutive trading cart over the top of the fence, and his horse neighed in answer to a greeting from Brownie.

"Now, my dear, I believe you will find the baby in the school yard," he said as he pulled up and Miss Minerva jumped out. To this day she wonders how her husband knew where to go and he only laughs and pinches her cheek.

CHAPTER VI

THE ARM OF THE LAW

HEN Billy announced so gleefully his satisfaction at being on the spot to watch the burning of the school house it never entered his curly head that it was their own campfire that had caused the alarm. The sparks from Jimmy's barrel had flown high above the fence and had been seen by a woman neighbor, who had turned in the alarm.

"Hunky dory in a box! Ain't this fun?" cried Jimmy. "I reckon the ol' school is gonter burn down to the ground. I reckon the janitor lef' his pipe lit in a pile of shavin's. That ol' janitor is all time burnin' down school houses. I reckon it is spreadin' like anything. I wisht it would

burn up my speller an' my reader an' my 'rithmetic. I hear the hookyladder jes' a licksplittin' an' the enjine a comin' like runaway ice waggins."

"My mother doesn't 'low me to go to fires," said Lina, hugging the contented Josephine in her arms.

"You all time makin' sech fool 'jections," declared Jimmie. "You ain't a goin' to no fire — the fire is comin' to you."

"Le's all of us get in the pony cart an' we kin see the fire better," suggested Billy. "I kin hol' Brownie an' see too. Maybe you'd better tromp out our fire, Wilkes Booth Lincoln, 'cause we won't need it any more."

As Miss Minerva and her Major came through the back gate two red-hatted firemen in huge top boots and carrying a great coil of hose came through the front gate, and streaming after them more and

more firemen and a crowd of boys and men and then a policeman to keep order.

"Where is the fire?" they shouted.

"In the cellar!" cried Jimmy. "I betcher it's in the cellar!"

Then things happened so fast it was ever after a jumble in the minds of the children. The battering in of the school house door by the intrepid firemen, the shouting of the crowd, the screaming of the woman who had turned in the alarm, and the sobbing of Miss Minerva when she discovered her baby safe in the arms of Lina seemed to happen all at once.

"False alarm! No fire here!" was the disgusted verdict of the handsome fire chief whose game of pinochle had been interrupted by the fire bells. "Who turned in the alarm?" he shouted.

"I did! And there was a fire, a big blaze! It looked like the whole school house was

going!" called the woman from her kitchen window.

The crowd laughed derisively and the woman slammed down the window.

"Here's the fire, Chief," said the Major coming from the back yard and touching the big man on the arm. He pointed to the smoldering embers that Wilkes Booth Lincoln had not quite succeeded in stamping out.

"Turn on the water!" roared the Chief and to the delight of Jimmie and Billy the great hose was pointed at the embers of their campfire and a stream of water came forth that tore a hole in the school yard and scattered doll baby dishes, the little frying pan and charred wood far and wide.

The realization that it was their fire that had caused all the excitement came to the boys all at once. Fear struggled with pride in their hearts. Not many boys could

boast that the fire engine and hook-and-ladder had been called out on their account; on the other hand, what would the penalty be? The policeman loomed up large and stern and his uniform brought disquieting thoughts of prison cells. Even the Major looked serious. There was no twinkle in his eye and his pleasant face was very red.

Finally there was Miss Minerva still carrying on like a distracted hen, but this time like a hen who had found her one chick. The baby was crowing with delight and rubbing the greasy chop bone all over her mother's tear-stained countenance. Lina was weeping noisily and Frances was pretending to cry, but was in reality enjoying the situation hugely, feeling that her game was having a delightfully melodramatic climax.

Billy and Jimmy looked at each other with questioning eyes.

"Do you reckon they'll hang us, Jimmy?"

"They's all time hangin' folks who set fire to schools," answered Jimmy, solemnly, "but I spec' my papa an' the Major kin prove a lullaby or somethin' an' we kin get off with jes' spendin' ninety-nine years in jail or somethin'."

"Are you scairt, Jimmy?"

"No, I ain't scairt. I'm game," boasted Jimmy, trying to wink back insistent tears.

"Well, I'm scairt, but I ain't gonter let the policeman know it. I reckon they'll let Lina an' Frances off, don't you, Jimmy? We mustn't tell they were mixed up in it — they nor Wilkes Booth Lincoln neither."

While Jimmy was so boldly asserting he wasn't a bit scared Sarah Jane charged through the crowd assembled at the school house gate and behind her came Benny Dick and the breathless mothers.

"I'm a huntin' fer a perliceman! I wants him now an' I wants him bad. Hi, you! Mr. Watchman! I done los' a sheet, puffectly good an' jes' washed, an' a red stockin' — bof of 'em tuck off'n the line. I wants ter sw'ar out a warrant fer the 'res' of that thar buglar."

"Who stole your things?" asked the policeman, much amused.

"What 'ud I be a huntin' you up fer if I know'd? I'd jes' be a huntin' up the pusson an' a tearin' him lim' from lim'. It wa' some low down mean nigger jes' full er spite or he'd a tuck both stockin's while he wa' about it." Sarah Jane rolled her eyes in fury. Suddenly those rolling orbs narrowed to slits. She had espied the pony cart with its improvised gypsy caravan covering. Those streaks had a familiar look. Also she was sure she had seen before the brilliant bit of color on the front seat.

Jimmy was still wearing the gypsy stocking cap. He had indeed forgotten all about it until he saw Sarah Jane's wrathful countenance. He put his hand to his head in a dazed way.

"Gimmy my stockin', you young lim' er Satan!" screamed Sarah Jane. "Gimmy my stockin' 'fo' I snatch you bal' haided. Gimmy my sheet off'n that there pony waggin. I done swo' I'll 'res' the pusson what done stole my b'longin's, an' yo' maw's son er not I'm gonter git you in the Black Maria on yo' way ter jail."

The policeman stopped laughing and looked serious. Just then Mrs. Hamilton made her way to the back yard, followed by her neighbors. She looked in the covered cart where Miss Minerva sat holding her baby and weeping, the little girls huddled on the floor. Wilkes Booth Lincoln had crawled under the vehicle.

"Why, Miss Minerva, that's my Roman scarf wrapped around your baby!" exclaimed the surprised Mrs. Hamilton.

Josephine flourished a greasy chop bone as further incriminating evidence of the doubtful honesty of her mother.

An intelligent looking, sweet-faced woman had followed the crowd to the school house and now made her way through the front gate where a policeman stood guard. He let her pass, touching his cap to her respectfully.

"Go on through, Miss Lindsey! I wouldn't be surprised if Sergeant Polk needs your services."

Miss Lindsey was the newly appointed probation officer. The office itself was in its infancy and owed its existence to the determined fight made by a few broad-minded, public-spirited men and women who had overcome official opposition.

Already Miss Lindsey had proven the wisdom of her appointment. The policemen respected her and deferred to her opinions.

"I'm glad you are here, Miss Lindsey," said Sergeant Polk, who had been in earnest talk with Major Estes and the fire chief. "We were discussing these kids and their monkey-shines. I guess the matter had better be turned over to you and the Juvenile Court." He then told her of the various complications.

"Do you think it will be necessary to take the matter to court?" she asked.

"It will scare them good and be a lesson for all the kids in town," said the Major. "Besides, Sarah Jane is determined to bring Jimmy to justice, and I am sure he has done no more than the rest of them. But can you arrange to have the matter all over with this morning? I don't think children should ever be made to worry over night

about their offenses and the necessary punishments. I believe the court is not in session on Saturday afternoon."

"Certainly we can get it over with quickly," said Miss Lindsey, smiling. "I agree with you. If there is to be punishment for children, it should be swift and sure. Do you remember what Kipling said when little Mowgli ran away with the monkeys and old Baloo and Bagheera fought for him and brought him back and then Baloo gave him the punishment he deserved? He said: 'There is no nagging in the jungle.'"

CHAPTER VII

THE CULPRITS IN COURT

THE Juvenile Court was also new in the town. It too had been subject to much discussion before the more progressive citizens had brought about its establishment. Now everyone realized it was as much a necessity to the welfare of the community as any other court. It was not held in the court house but in an old residence near by.

It was a sad little procession that entered the building; children, parents and guardians, police and fire chief, the enraged Sarah Jane with the colt-like Benny Dick and Aunt Cindy still bringing up the rear. Brownie and the Major's horse were tied to iron hitching posts that stood at inter-

vals along the curbing. If Jimmy and Billy had not been so miserable these hitching posts would have delighted their souls, for the tops were horses' heads with iron rings in their gaping, red nostrils. As it was, fear had crushed their spirits beyond the power of an entire cavalcade of iron steeds to revive.

Miss Lindsey took the culprits into an office across the hall from the court room and there in short order she unwound a little necessary red-tape, taking down names and addresses. She and the Major then slipped into the court room and informed the Judge of the trouble.

"Don't be too hard on them, Tom," the Major said, "but let them realize the gravity of their misdemeanors."

"All right!" smiled Judge Turpin. "They can come in now. I am about through with the docket."

Judge Turpin was a young man, so young that it was feared by some when he was first offered the office that he would not be able to uphold the dignity of the law; but these fears were soon proved groundless. The order in his court was perfect and his rulings were considered by all to be just and sensible. His eyes were kind and sad but his mouth had a little humorous twist. He and Major Estes were great friends. Indeed it was largely through the older man's efforts that Turpin had received the appointment, the Major recognizing his suitability because of a great human sympathy that Tom Turpin possessed.

The culprits with their mortified mothers and aunts filed into the court room. It was the one-time parlor of an aristocratic old family and the Major could remember well when a different court had been held there by the handsome daughters of the house.

The Judge's bench was on a platform between the two front windows. Chairs were ranged around the room and directly in front of the Judge and facing him was a large chair for the witness.

"With what are these children charged?" asked the Judge in a voice in which sternness struggled with sympathy.

"That there Jimmy Garner done stol' my stockin' an' —" but a reprimand from the Judge silenced Sarah Jane, who found it hard to have to take a back seat and be quiet. Jimmy still wore the stocking on his head. He was so miserable he had forgotten to take it off. Through the window Sarah Jane could see the little pony cart with her sheet still tied around the canopy.

"Major Estes, perhaps you can tell me what is the charge against them."

"Stealing a baby; stealing a sheet and

one red stocking; stealing six lamb chops, a Roman scarf, a sewing bag — " Here Lina made a desperate grab at her head. She too had forgotten to take off the gypsy headgear.

" Is that all? "

" No, your Honor," continued the Major. " Making a fire in the school house yard and thereby endangering the city property! "

Lina sobbed and Wilkes Booth Lincoln groaned in terror.

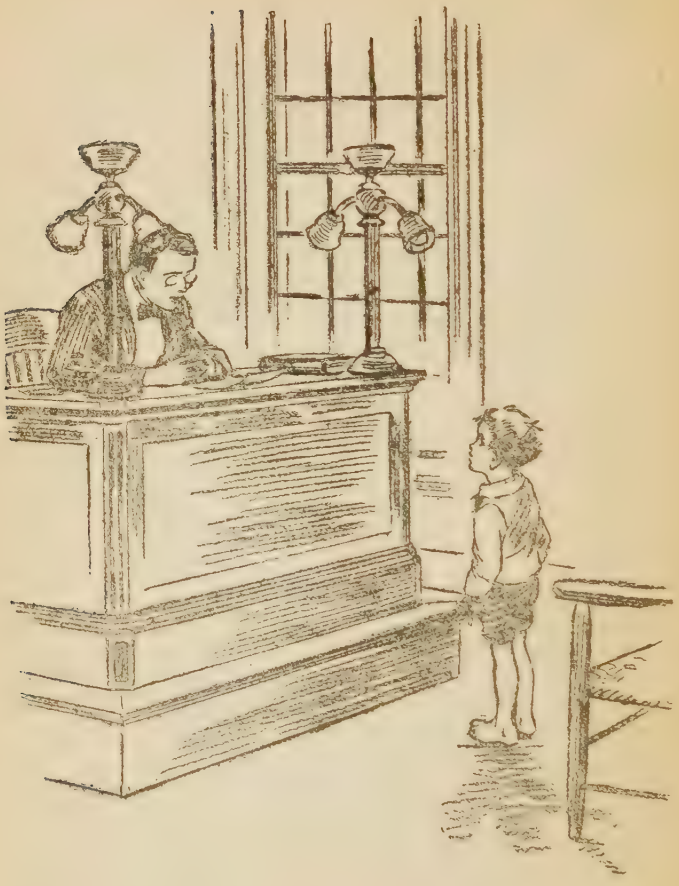
The Judge consulted the memorandum handed him by Miss Lindsey.

" William Green Hill, come forward."

Billy stepped up as though the last trump had sounded.

" Hold up your right hand and swear —"

" Aunt Minerva don't like me to swear, Jedge, even when th' ain't no damn in it," faltered Billy.



"That will be all right, Billy," the Major assured him.

"Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?" continued the Judge, his mouth trying not to smile.

"I swear to tell nothin' but the truth, but, Jedge, I don't want ter promise to tell all the truth 'cause you might ask me somethin' I done swore not to tell. And the Major's always a tellin' me no gennelman 'll tell on the ladies."

"I see. Well now, William —"

"Please, Jedge, call me Billy."

"Well, Billy, I want you to begin at the beginning and tell me all about what you and your friends did this morning."

"All right, Jedge! I reckon it was jes' the weather what started us. It was jes' too good a day to keep still and stay aroun' the house."

As Judge Turpin had been thinking all morning of the game of golf that he was to have that afternoon, he no longer tried to suppress his smile.

"We thought we'd get up a game what all of us could play, even Brownie and Wilkes Booth Lincoln," Billy continued. "Brownie is my pony, Jedge, and Wilkes Booth Lincoln an' me is kinder twinses, cept'n we ain't got the same mothers an' fathers. We talked a lot about what to play an' by'm by we hit on gypsies."

"Who suggested the game?" asked the Judge.

Billy was silent. He remembered well that it had been Frances but he was determined not to tell on the ladies.

"Can't you remember?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Did you suggest it?"

"No, sir."

Judge Turpin looked keenly at the children ranged behind the witness. Frances held up her hand. The Judge smiled and told Billy to go on with his tale.

"When we plays we tries to play true. Gypsies is stealers, so we 'lowed we mus' be stealers too — only you see, Jedge, we were only borrowin' 'cause we 'lowed we were gonter take back every livin' thing we done stealed, cep'n the victuals, an' we's a takin' them back, Jedge, in a way, like Queen Victoria took the pill in the riddle — in cider."

Here Mrs. Garner and the Major laughed out in court and Miss Minerva looked as though her burdens were more than she could bear.

"Who stole — that is, borrowed, the sheet and red stocking?" asked the Judge.

"Jimmy Garner! But he was boun' to do it, Judge. There wa'n't no way out of

it, 'cause he got dared, double dared, steal a copper cent off'n a dead man's eye if he didn't," said Billy quite solemnly with an air of conviction.

"Who dared and double dared him?" asked the Judge seriously.

Again Billy was silent and again the Judge scanned the row of children in the rear. Again Frances raised her hand and nodded. Frances was enjoying herself hugely. She knew Judge Turpin very well when he was not sitting on that platform and looking so solemn and she was not in the least afraid of him. His nod of approval when she raised her hand was very encouraging. She had half a mind to take the burden of all the misdemeanors on her own shoulders. They would not do anything to her, she was sure, because she was a kind of lady. It was very pleasant to have the Judge look at her that way think-

ing all the time what a brave, honest little lady Frances Black was.

"Jimmy 'lowed he would steal from his mamma when he squeezed through the fence. We was gonter steal from nothin' but mammas an' aunts when we started out. You see I ain't got any mamma so I had to steal from an aunt. Sarah Jane had jes' hunged out her wash an' I reckon her stockin' took up so much room Jimmy couldn't git by. 'Co'se it was the girls' business to find doll rags an' things for us boys to dress up in but you kin see, Jedge, what a fine gypsy cap Sarah Jane's stocking makes."

All eyes were turned on poor Jimmy, who was suddenly aware of the fact that he was wearing the stolen stocking on his head. He snatched it off, much abashed. Jimmy could not stand being laughed at and now everybody was laughing at him.

Sarah Jane grabbed her stocking and spread it out lovingly on her knees.

"The sheet ain't hurt a mite, Jedge — I shouldn't wonder if it ain't bleached it some the way we done kep' it in the sun. We tied it on mighty cute, jes' like a tradin' cart."

Billy's manner was exceedingly ingratiating, but the Judge refused to melt. "Now tell me about the chops and the work bag. Who stole them? A Roman scarf too is missing."

Again Billy was silent. The Judge scanned the row of faces behind the witness and Frances raised her hand. Now it was well known to the children that Lina had purloined the chops and Roman shawl. Jimmy looked mystified at the behavior of Frances. What could be her game? Lina wept piteously and Mrs. Hamilton held her head up triumphantly. She had dreaded

the time when her child would have to confess to the chops and scarf and now she need have no fear. That naughty little Frances Black had stolen the things after all, and her own child was guiltless. Mrs. Black was sorry her daughter had been so naughty but was proud in her heart that she was so honest in her confessions.

"And now," continued the Judge, "Billy, I want you to tell me all about the baby. How did you happen to think of stealing your kind aunt's baby?"

"Why, gypsies is always stealin' babies. We wouldn't a hurt little Josephine for nothin' an' we 'lowed we'd get her back long befo' Aunt Minerva got back from market. Josephine had a splendid time an' ain't cried once since we lef' home."

"Who thought first of stealing the baby?"

"It kinder comed into all our haids to

onct. Jedge, like bad colds or somethin'. It looked like it jes' hit us all at onct. One minute we weren't thinkin' about stealin' babies an' the nex' we were stealin' Josephine."

"Who were?"

"Well — er — er — Jimmy'n me!"

"Which one of you did the stealing? Carried the baby off, I mean."

Billy was silent.

"Did you?"

"No, sir!"

"Did Jimmy?"

"No, sir!"

Again the Judge looked on the row of children and again the eager Frances raised her hand. The Judge smiled on her. Billy was all unconscious of what was going on behind him.

"Who told you gypsies steal babies?"

Billy looked wretched indeed at this

question. He remembered well that it was his dear Wilkes Booth Lincoln who had told the story of the gypsies down near the plantation who had stolen a baby. He was determined to protect his little black friend as well as the girls. The story, innocent in itself, had been the thing that had inspired the stealing of Josephine. The Judge repeated his question. Billy was silent, looking so utterly miserable that his interlocutor felt sorry for him.

Again the Judge sought the culprits in the rear. This time three hands shot up, Frances's, Jimmy's and Wilkes Booth Lincoln's. The Judge looked mystified. He consulted his memorandum.

"Did Wilkes Booth Lincoln suggest to you that gypsies always steal babies?"

Billy was silent with a silence that could be felt through the whole court.

"Why won't you tell me? Did you

promise Wilkes Booth Lincoln not to tell?" The Judge's voice was a little stern.

"No, sir!" Billy answered quickly. "Wilkes Booth Lincoln ain't never done nothin' since we's born that he done make me promise not to tell. Wilkes Booth Lincoln ain't done nothin' but tell 'bout gypsies stealin' a baby down near our plantation an' gettin' caught up with befo' they reached the landin'."

"Who was it took the baby out of her crib and carried her down stairs?"

Billy was silent, his small mouth tightly closed. This thing of protecting the ladies was getting to be very irksome. The only sound in the court room was Lina's sobbing. It would have been much easier to protect ladies if they wouldn't sob.

Again the Judge turned for enlightenment to the others. This time Jimmy and Frances both raised their hands.

"Did you carry the baby down stairs, Billy?"

"No, sir. Aunt Minerva ain't never let me carry Josephine since she's born. But I woulder have carried her if I hadn't a been scairt I might drop her. I was the one 'sponsible for borrowin' her. Thain't nobody to blame but me for borrowin' her. If I didn't borrow the baby I wouldn't a been totin' fair, after everybody else done their part."

"Umhum! Thank you, Billy, you may take one of those chairs back there for the present."

Billy jumped from the witness chair, much relieved that a part of his ordeal was over. He squeezed into a seat by Jimmy.

The Judge looked thoughtfully at the other children. Lina had stopped sobbing, but her face was hidden in her hands. Wilkes Booth Lincoln had forgotten he

was afraid and was looking with adoration on his Billy. Frances was eager and alert as though she was expecting to be called next. Jimmy's face was red and his hair was standing up like a blacking brush. Behind the children ranged the parents and guardians with varying expressions of uneasiness and pride depicted on their countenances. The baby had become restless and transferred herself to Aunt Cindy, who dandled her automatically.

"James Lafayette Garner!" called the Judge. "Come forward!"

CHAPTER VIII

A STOP PLAY SENTENCE

AMES LAFAYETTE GARNER —"

"Yes, sir, but folks usu'lly calls me Jimmy."

"Well, Jimmy, hold up your right hand and swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth."

"I'll tell the truth, an' the whole truth — but I's scairt to say I won't tell nothin' but the truth. I'm a gonter try not to — but, Jedge, looks like sometimes I remembers what didn't happen better'n what did."

"Do your best, Jimmy. Now tell from the beginning all about it."

"Things happened jes' like Billy said, 'ceptin' he's all time leavin' out somethin'. He done lef' out that Lina stole the chops.

I wouldn't call it borrowin' when you done et 'em up, all but the bones. I ain't done nothin' but borrow Sarah Jane's things — an' she kin have 'em back as good as new. I ain't stole 'em any mo'n she stole my cravat, what Gramma Garner done knitted for me. She borrowed it, an' put it on for a garter. I reckon she's got it on this minute."

Sarah Jane quickly pulled her skirts down and the fierce expression on her face faded into a look of unctuous innocence, as Jimmy continued:

"Co'se I ain't a mindin' 'bout the garter I'd a give it to her if she had a asked me, but I reckon she forgot. I reckon Sarah Jane would a lent me her sheet an' stockin' if I had asked her. Sarah Jane is so nice to kids." Sarah Jane smirked at that.

"Why didn't you ask her, then?"

"'Cause you see, Jedge, we was a playin'

gypsies, and gypsies don't never ask for nothin'. We all time play true."

"Are you sure Lina took the chops and not Frances?"

"Co'se I's sho'! Lina's all time takin' her mamma's lamb chops an' callin' it borrowin'. She's the sissies' girl they is. All time cryin' in p'lice court."

With that Lina sat up, uncovered her face and stuck out her tongue at Jimmy's sturdy back.

"Did Frances help take the chops?"

"No, sir. Frances don't never help nobody do nothin'. She is always a doin' what she calls head work — makin' up mischief for us alls to get in. She is the thinkin'es' girl they is. I shouldn't be 'stonished if some day Frances Black didn't think up somethin' for Billy an me to do that would get us hunged."

"Did you and Frances and Wilkes Booth

Lincoln all tell the others that gypsies steal babies? You held up your hand just now."

"You see, Jedge, I helt up my hand 'cause Frances is all time thinkin' she is so smart an' makin' out she done all the devilment. I had my fingers crost all the time, though."

"Your fingers crossed?"

"Yes, Jedge, that's to show I am jes' a foolin'."

"Did Frances have hers crossed?"

"Gee whilikins, Jedge! Girls don't never cross they fingers — leas' not often. They goes roun' with green leaves in they shoes or somethin', ready all time to fib. Girls is the sneakin'es' things they is."

"Did you and Frances, between you, carry the baby down stairs? You both held up your hands. Or did you have your fingers crossed again?"

"No, sah, Jedge, I was jes' a foolin'. Frances's all time so smart-aleck — a makin' out she done all the devilment when she ain't done nothin' mo'n jes' hook her mamma's second bes' work bag an' some stale tea cakes an' some cheese the rats had been a gnawin'."

Here Mrs. Black bridled and flushed. Mrs. Black was conscious that housekeeping was never her strong point.

"Who carried the baby down stairs?"

"Lina done it. She's all time crazy about babies, a wantin' to play house an' be the mamma. She even thinks babies is pretty when everybody with any sense knows they is ugly as mud fences."

"Did she go up alone and get the baby?"

"No, sir. Lina an' Frances is scairt er flabby-men an' mice an' things. They don't never go nowhere by theyselves.

Billy an' me all time gotter go 'long an' pertect 'em. They is the fraid-cattes' girls they is."

"Where was Aunt Cindy when you stole the baby?"

"Now, Jedge, you ain't a sho' 'nough thinkin' that we meant to steal that baby? Who wants a baby for keeps? They is the troublesomes' things they is."

"Well, where was Aunt Cindy when you borrowed the baby?" asked the Judge, concealing an irrepressible grin behind his handkerchief.

"Aunt Cindy was a beatin' eggs, an' she was a singin': 'Roll, Jordan, Roll,' 'til it sounded mos' like a sho' 'nough ten pin alley." It may be interesting to the reader to learn that it was many years after this scene in the Juvenile Court that Jimmy realized that Aunt Cindy was imitating the River Jordan when she rumbled forth those

realistic rolls, and not a man named Jourdan who was the proprietor of a pool room and bowling alley in their little town.

"After you — er — borrowed the baby, where did you go?"

"We went to the school house 'cause Frances said nobody wouldn't think to come pester us there 'cause we ain't none of us stuck on school."

"What did you do when you got in the school yard?"

"We jes' a went on playin' gypsies. First we built a fire."

"Didn't you know it was wrong to go to the school house on Saturday and build a fire?"

"No, sir. Grown folks an' teachers is all time tryin' to make us go to school, an' they ain't never tol' us we musn't go there on Saturday. An' nobody ain't never tol' us we mustn't build no fire in the back yard.

Jedge, nobody ain't never tol' us we mus'n't borrow Miss Minerva's baby neither."

"Who built the fire?"

"Wilkes Booth Lincoln laid it 'cause he's all time layin' fires for Aunt Cindy, an' he is the bes'es fire layer they is, but I lit it 'cause I is the onlies' one what kin scratch a match on the seat er my pants."

"What did you think when you heard the fire bells? Did you know it was ringing for the school house?"

"Sho' we did! We all time havin' fire drills 'thout no fire an' when the bells rang two-twenty-two an' we thought the ol' school was gonter burn up we jes' jump Juber we were so glad. We were so glad we were already there to see it."

"Weren't you ashamed of having set your school on fire?"

"Why, Jedge, we ain't knowed our little fire was two-twenty-two. We ain't

knowed it until the chief called up the hookyladders an' had 'em shoot the water on it."

"Weren't you ashamed then?"

Jimmy hesitated. He looked slyly at his fingers, crossed them and uncrossed them several times, first on one hand then on the other. Then his face flushed and he looked steadily at the Judge, who was waiting patiently.

"Jedge, I'm jes' like Jefferson Davis 'cause I can't tell a lie. Me'n Billy was that proud it was all we could do to keep from bustin' on each other."

The Juvenile Court echoed with laughter as Jimmy left the witness chair and resumed his seat beside Billy.

Sarah Jane was called next. She loudly and repeatedly disclaimed any intention of prosecuting the son of her beloved mistress. She declared that Jimmy was one of the

best and noblest of creation and if she had known he wanted to borrow her things she would have been glad to lend them to him.

When Lina was finally called by Judge Turpin the infant Josephine in the most unexpected manner decided to get in the game. Lina arose reluctantly and turning around cast one appealing glance at her mother. Aunt Cindy, in whose arms Josephine was bouncing up and down, was seated directly behind Lina. As the little girl turned the baby became aware that here was her delightful companion of the morning, the giver of greasy bones, the person who held her so tenderly and talked such pretty talk.

"Goo! Goo!" gurgled the infant and held out her little arms to be taken again. But Lina, as much as she felt like responding to the advances of the fascinating live doll, knew that this was no time for such

weakness and turned sadly away to go to her doom.

"Wow! Wow!" yelled Josephine, still holding out her arms and doing her best to squirm out of Aunt Cindy's grasp.

"Give her to me," whispered Miss Minerva, but the baby would have none of her own mother, but proceeded to cry vociferously for Lina.

The Judge looked on amused while the court was in a hubbub.

"Maybe you had best take the child," he said kindly to Lina. "I don't see how we can proceed with the investigation if the baby cries so loudly. You can just hold the baby, child, and I won't swear you in as witness."

Lina, surprised and delighted, took the importunate Josephine from jealous Aunt Cindy and quiet and order were once more restored in the court.

Frances had been eagerly awaiting her turn. This was a dramatic ending to a glorious escapade and she would have been disappointed indeed to be let off as easily

as Lina. With head erect and glowing eyes she took her place by the bench and glibly swore herself in as witness. Rapidly and without hesitation she told the tale of the morning's adventure.

"Ol' Frances Black is all time got sech a gift er gab," Jimmy whispered to Billy, but the clerk rapped for order and Jimmy had to keep his criticisms to himself.

The Judge listened attentively to Frances's eloquent account.

"Now tell me," he asked when she had finally reached the point where the fire bells were heard, "why did you hold up your hand and give me to understand you had been guilty of various things of which you were innocent?"

"'Cause I believe ladies have jes' as much right to go to jail as gentlemen. Billy's got it in his head that girls ain't good enough to be treated like boys, an' I wasn't gonter stand for it. I can do anything Billy and Jimmy can do, an' when I found out Billy was gonter shut up an' keep on sayin' nothin' whenever Lina an' I had done something I jes' thought I'd make out

I'd done more than I had jes' to ketch even with him. Of course, I know Billy is a gentleman an' all that, but I don't want to be protected. Lina likes it, but I don't. An' besides, it's noble to suffer for others' sins."

"Now, Frances, tell me something," said the Judge a little sternly. "Aren't you ashamed and sorry to have caused all the sorrow and anxiety this morning? You children have been guilty of grave wrong-doing. I want you to feel that you have done wrong. Do you feel it and are you sorry?"

"Well, Judge Turpin, cross my heart and hope I may die, I ain't very sorry. We've had the bestes' time and nobody ain't hurt. The baby is all right and we are going to give back every las' thing we took 'cep' the chops and tea cakes and things. I can't feel very sorry when somehow it

seems like it wasn't our fault. It can't have been so terribly bad if we had such a good time a doin' it.

"When I've been bad and known all the time I was bein' bad, then I'm kinder sorry afterwards. But looks to me like it's kinder hard on kids to expect them to play happy together, 'thout fussin', and then, when they've done it and had a grand game 'thout gettin' into any rows, and jes' because a ol' fool woman sees a little blaze and puts in a fire alarm, all the firemen and p'licemen and mothers and Majors and Miss Minervas and Aunt Cindies and Sarah Janes come along and drag 'em off to jail." Frances had worked herself up to a great pitch of eloquence.

The Major whispered to Judge Turpin: "I see Tennessee has in store a great female criminal lawyer. That child could sway a jury and make it believe black was white."

Frances was excused and regretfully left the arm chair where she had been heartily enjoying herself. Wilkes Booth Lincoln was called next. The little fellow was trembling with fright, but a clear look from Billy put heart in him and he was able to stand up like a man and be sworn.

"Wilkes Booth Lincoln, did you know you were doing wrong when you helped steal your mistress's baby?"

"Yessir!"

"Did you know you were doing wrong when you built the fire in the school house yard?"

"No, sir. I been a buildin' fires for folks so much I ain't never stopped to think 'bout bein' wrong."

"If you knew it was wrong to steal Mrs. Estes' baby, why didn't you make the other children stop?"

"Jedge," exclaimed the boy, "I's black.

'Tain't fer me to tell white chilluns what they mus' an' they mus'n'. Aunt Cindy'd w'ar me out ef she ever cotched me tryin' fer to boss Billy. I jes' trus'es Billy an' follers him."

The Judge looked very grave and told the little colored boy he could go back to his seat by his white friend. There was an impressive silence. The children moved uneasily in their chairs. The mothers and guardians fidgeted a little too. Aunt Cindy began to wonder what she was going to give the Major for dinner, and Sarah Jane, although she was at least half a mile from home, fancied she could smell the bean soup she had left on the back of the stove burning.

At last the Judge spoke.

"Children, I know it is hard always to tell right from wrong when we are having a good time, especially on a day like this

when the air is so full of life and one feels like doing something different from all the other days. But we must remember that if our good times interfere with other persons and make them miserable we are doing wrong. I want all of you to think how much unhappiness you have caused this morning and what real harm might have been done by your carelessness and thoughtlessness.

"If a man wants to be truly a gentleman, and protect those weaker than he is, he must be careful never to place them where he will have to protect them." Here he looked meaningly at Billy. "If a little girl has so much love for a baby that belongs to a neighbor, she might stop to think what that baby must mean to the neighbor and what agony of mind a mother would be in who comes home from market and finds the cradle empty." Lina hugged Josephine

more closely and looked appealingly at Miss Minerva.

"A boy who is so critical of girls and so anxious to put them in wrong should try to understand how he appears to others," the Judge went on. "First he should realize a lie is a lie, whether fingers are crossed or not. Next he should know that the most unmanly thing a man can do is to put the blame on others."

"Yes, sir," gasped Jimmy, knowing very well whom the Judge meant.

"If a child is clever at making up games and other ways to amuse her companions she must not abuse that cleverness by suggesting things that cause trouble. And if she wants to prove that women are as good as men, she must use those brains that God has given her to prove that she is better than the best men, not the worst. Her right is to do right, not to do wrong."

This last remark of Judge Turpin's had little meaning for most of the children, but Frances's intelligent eyes gave back an answering gleam showing she at least understood.

"And now," Judge Turpin continued, "if little colored children play with white children they must not feel that they may do wrong because the white children do wrong. What is wrong for one is wrong for the other. A colored child must be brave enough to stand up for the right, do it himself and try to make the others do it, no matter who tells him he must follow the lead of the white children. Otherwise he will not grow up to be the fine man he should. He must not feel he was meant to be bossed by white children. Do you understand me, Wilkes Booth Lincoln?"

"Yessir," faintly. "Not eben Billy?"

"Not even Billy! And now," here the

Judge stood up and instinctively all the children stood up and then the parents and guardians, "now I must pass a sentence on you children. You must be punished to make you remember not to play games that will make others suffer."

"Don't be scairt!" Billy whispered to Wilkes Booth Lincoln, whose skinny little frame was trembling visibly. Billy put an arm over his little black friend's shoulder.

"I believe the greatest punishment I can inflict on all of you, and at the same time the one that will be of the most service to you, is to say that you must not play with one another for a month," the Judge announced. "Lina and Frances must not play with each other nor must Billy and Jimmy and Wilkes Booth Lincoln play together. This is a hard sentence and before the month is up you will all of you understand how hard, but I think it is for

the best. Each week you must report to Miss Lindsey, who will come to your homes. I mean, of course, that you must not be together for any purpose. If you meet each other on the street or at school you must bow politely, but not say anything. Do all of you understand?"

"Yes, sir!" they answered miserably.

CHAPTER IX

A QUESTION OF TALENTS

AIN'T a talkin' to nobody," shouted Jimmy. "I'm jes' a talkin' to myself. Jedge Turpin ain't give no orders a little boy can't talk to himself. I ain't a playin' with nobody. I'm a playin' all by myself. I bet I kin turn a somerset better'n a boy what lives nex' door to me." Jimmy proceeded to show what he could do in the way of somersaults, turning over and over on the short grass in his mother's yard until his fat legs came in resounding contact with the whitewashed paling that separated the Garner yard from Miss Minerva's.

"Ouch! I betcher can't do that, Billy —

I mean I bet the boy what lives next door in Miss Minerva's house can't do that."

Billy, sitting on the steps with a book in his hand, refused to respond, but pretended to read. The events of the morning had seared deep into the child's soul and he could not understand how Jimmy could be so indifferent to the disgrace that had befallen them. He had not been so sensible of that disgrace himself until Aunt Minerva had taken him into the parlor and prayed over him. After Judge Turpin's speech of dismissal Billy had left the court with a feeling of relief that matters were no worse. He was glad that it was all over and no real damage done, and satisfied that the verdict was a just one. He was willing to take his punishment although he knew it was going to be hard. Not to be allowed to play with his friends for just one afternoon was as severe a penalty as

he had ever experienced and he realized that a whole month of such denial would be bitter almost beyond endurance. He was determined to stick to the letter of Judge Turpin's ruling and had driven all the way home without once addressing a remark to Jimmy, who had sat perched on the seat by him almost bursting with conversation, which nothing but Billy's air of aloofness had held within bounds. Not to speak to Jimmy was bad enough, but it was a hundred million times harder to pass by his beloved Wilkes Booth Lincoln with nothing but a nod. In the little colored boy's eyes was the expression a collie dog might have when his master refuses to pet him.

The Major did not seem to feel so disgraced, but had eaten his dinner as if nothing had happened. Billy had a feeling that his old friend had rather enjoyed the morn-

ing. He did not say so, but Billy had seen him, as he drove off after dinner, stop his buggy and pick up Mr. Garner. The two gentlemen had evinced an unusual air of joviality and neither had looked at all disgraced.

Billy had been astonished, however, at the effect his misbehavior had had on his aunt. Miss Minerva had controlled herself as long as the Major was present but as soon as he left she gave way to copious tears, and taking Billy by the hand, led him into the parlor, where first she talked to him so seriously that the boy wished with all his heart and soul that he had never been born; then she prayed over him long and earnestly. If only she had allowed him to do the praying as she had on a former occasion it would not have been so bad, but finally her endless repetitions dulled his sorrow till at length he almost fell

asleep with his head buried in the Major's soft leather chair in front of which he was kneeling.

"Don't do that!" his mind warned as he struggled back to wakefulness, "Aunt Minerva'd never forgive you, Billy Hill, if you went an' falled asleep while she was 'zortin'. Think about Maje an' what he'd want you to do an' stay awake."

He buried his nose in the leather and sniffed luxuriously. It was that good man-smell, mixture of leather and tobacco, that he loved so much.

"Ah!" thought his aunt, "at last I have moved him. He is weeping." She well knew that it was a difficult thing to make her nephew cry and she was delighted that her prayers had so brought him to a realization of his wrong-doing that tears had followed. Moses when he struck the rock and brought forth water was not more satisfied

than was Miss Minerva now. With a long-drawn amen she arose from her knees.

"Now don't forget what Judge Turpin said," she admonished.

"As though I's likely to," muttered Billy to himself. "Women folks is sho' strange."

In the kitchen Aunt Cindy was rumbling and grumbling away at Wilkes Booth Lincoln. The boy was crouched in a dejected heap on the door-sill. The old woman could say nothing that would add to his misery. His cup of sorrow was running over. He bowed his head and let the floods of her wrath sweep over him.

"You low down maggot, a leadin' po' lil Billy inter mischief! The Jedge oughter a put yo' in the Black M'ria an' sint yo' to the calaboose. You ain't fitten ter 'sociate with white chilluns. Why don't you answer me?" demanded the old colored woman, testily.

"You ain't arsked me nothin', Aunt Cindy."

"Don't you answer me back! Don't you dar' ter answer me back!"

"No'm!" Wilkes Booth Lincoln knew quite well the distinction between answering and answering back, and was careful to observe it.

"If'n the Major hadn't a put his foot down on you gittin' yo' deserves I'd lick you mos' to de'f'. I's a gret min' ter do it as it is. Looks lak the mo' chilluns the Major gits aroun' him the mo' chil'lak he gits 'bout how ter treat 'em. Come out here an' tell me I ain't ter lick you onder no circumstantials. If'n he don't look sharp he's a gonter raise up a free nigger ter git hung. Ain't you got nothin' ter say fer yo'se'f?"

"No'm — yessum — I mean no'm!"

"An' the Jedge a tellin' yo' you ain't

meant ter be bossed by white chilluns! The Jedge kin tell you that in co't all he's a min' ter, but I's a gonter tell you somethin' right in this here kitchen: yo' go 'roun' argufyin' with white chilluns 'bout what they mus' an' they mus'n't an' I'll sen' you back ter yo' mammy. You git a tas'e er squattin' down agin in that there ol' ramshackledy cabin an' I'll be boun' you won't walk aroun' here so proudified. What yo' a cryin' fur?"

"I's a cryin' 'cause Billy won't play wif me. How many years in a month, Aunt Cindy?"

"Thain't so very many, chil'," answered the old woman, somewhat softened by the abject misery of her charge. "You run along now an' split some kin'lin' an' bring in some wood."

Billy, sitting on the front steps, could hear the sharp blows of the hatchet and he

wished with all his heart for some hard manual labor. It might make him forget his troubles. He wondered if he might not work with Wilkes Booth Lincoln. Judge Turpin had said nothing about not working with the other children.

"I reckon I'd better ask Maje," he decided. He looked stonily at Jimmy, whose somersaults had brought him to the dividing line. Jimmy kicked the fence and grinned enticingly through the palings.

"I ain't a talkin' to the boy what lives next door to me. I ain't 'lowed to talk to him 'cause he's all time gettin' me into mischief. I'm jes' a talkin' to myself. I'm all time talkin' to myself any ways. There comes ol' Lina Hamilton a switchin' along like a peacock. She is the turned-up-nosest person they is. I reckon she's through stealin' babies for a while. I reckon she was sore she hadn't a let me

carry the kid down stairs after we all got 'rested. Here comes ol' Frances Black too — both of them a wheelin' their fool dolls. They ain't got no shame in 'em, those girls."

Billy gave his neighbor a quizzical look which Jimmy well understood to mean that he, Jimmy, was quite as shameless as the little girls.

"I know mighty well what the boy what lives next door to me what is named Billy Hill thinks. He thinks I all time ought to be 'shamed too. Well, I ain't. My mamma ain't near so shamed for me as Mrs. Black and Mrs. Hamilton is for their ol' chillen. I heard my mamma say one time that what happens to mens don't disgrace 'em for life like it done womens. My papa ain't 'shamed er me one mite. He laughed fit to kill when Mamma tol' him all about it. He called Sarah Jane in an'

give her a dollar an' tol' her to buy herself two pairs of red stockings. I betcher Miss Minerva is almost 'shamed to death 'bout her nephew, but Miss Minerva is all time 'shamed 'bout somethin' or other. She's 'shamed she married a man an' 'shamed her nephew ain't a niece."

Billy tried not to smile. He was sure Jimmy was not living up either to the spirit or letter of Judge Turpin's verdict. Both boys watched Lina and Frances as with studied care they wheeled their doll baby carriages through the gates of their respective homes. The little girls did not speak a word but bowed primly as they passed.

"Look at them girls! You needn't tell me they ain't playin' together 'cause they is. They're playin' lady-come-to-see. Here they come across the street! I betcher they're gonter try to git us to play with

them — me'n that boy what lives next door to me," declared Jimmy.

With sedate dignity the little girls guided their carriages across the street and then as they passed the boys they gave them low bows and polite smiles. Billy responded gallantly but Jimmy frowned indignantly.

"Hi there! I reckon I ain't gonter bow to girls what it's aginst the law to play with — what is all time gettin' 'rested an' took to jail."

Lina's eyes filled with tears, but Frances's eyes snapped and her lips pressed into a straight, hard line. She said nothing but already she had begun to plan ways to get even with Jimmy just as soon as the month of probation should be up.

Sunday morning was greeted with unusual joy by the four children. At least they could sit together at Sunday School

and while they could not speak to one another, they could talk through Miss Cecilia. Jimmy, for all his bravado, was very lonesome and longed for the companionship of his kind.

The lesson was on the parable of the talents. First their gentle teacher read it to them and then explained it. It seemed to the children that Miss Cecilia had never looked so lovely as she did on that Sunday morning. Her sweet eyes were so kind and sad. Evidently she felt very sorry for them and was anxious to make them forget their trouble and disgrace. She was careful to avoid any subject that might suggest, even remotely, their escapade of the day before. The children listened eagerly to her words.

"And now each one of you has a talent and you can't begin too young to develop it. We mustn't have the Master find in the

end that we have hidden our talents away in a napkin. What do you want to do in life, Lina? What talent have you that you would like to develop?"

"I'd like the confession of motherhood," said Lina, glibly. "I'd like to marry a rich man and have fourteen children, seven boys and seven girls. I believe I'd have a talent for having babies, 'cause I love 'em so much."

"Ah, indeed!" said Miss Cecilia, hoping devoutly that the Bible class in the adjoining pew could not hear what was going on in her class.

"And you, Frances, what talent would you like to develop?"

"Oh, I'm going to write novels and plays. I'm going to make myself the hero in my novels and I reckon I'll act in my plays myself. I have thought out a story all about gypsies and jails and things."

"And you, Jimmy?" Miss Cecilia asked hurriedly. "What will you be?"

"I'm gonter be a fireman part of the time an' a p'liceman the rest of the time. I'd make the jimdandies' p'liceman they is, but when fires break out I'm gonter put on a red hat an' go an' squirt water on 'em."

"And you, Billy — what will you be?" Miss Cecilia asked again, hope dying in her breast. There was no way to keep off the subject of yesterday's happenings.

"I'm gonter be a jedge," said Billy solemnly.

Church services were held immediately after Sunday School. Miss Cecilia kept her little flock together until their parents and guardians claimed them.

On their walk to church the Major and his wife were joined by Mr. and Mrs. Garner, later by the Blacks and Hamiltons.

"I have just been telling my wife," said the Major, "that I am glad our poor little kiddies won't have to hear anything more about their experience of yesterday. I think they have had it rubbed in on them enough now." He then told his neighbors what Miss Lindsey had said concerning nagging in the jungle.

"You are right," was Mr. Garner's hearty acceptance of that doctrine.

Miss Minerva shut her lips tightly. Nagging was to her mind a means of grace. When a sinner had sinned he must be told of it often lest he forget. She had telephoned her trouble to the minister of her church and he had agreed with her in thinking Judge Turpin had let the sinners off too lightly.

"Well, all I can say is that Tom Turpin is punishing us more than he is the children. I don't see how I am to keep Fran-

ces amused and happy for a month," sighed Mrs. Black. "She gave me more trouble yesterday afternoon than she has for years."

"Lina was impossible too," confessed Mrs. Hamilton. "She is usually such a good child, but she hung around and whined for hours yesterday."

"I call it a shame," put in Mrs. Garner. "Jimmy is enough trouble as it is without taking his companions from him."

"Perhaps on account of good behavior we can get the term shortened," twinkled the Major. "I'll see Turpin about it."

Miss Minerva said nothing but she looked reprovingly at her too soft-hearted husband and wondered that he could ever have been a fighter.

Poor Miss Minerva had not yet recovered from her fright about her precious baby. These other women could look lightly upon

the loss of a few lamb chops and cookies; what were they compared to her darling Josephine? To be sure she had her baby back and the chops and cookies were gone forever, but her nerves had been racked and it would take many days for her to get back her tone and poise. Then there was the immortal soul of her nephew, the immortal souls of all the children. She had a kind of doubt about Jimmy's having an immortal soul, he was such a scamp. But Jimmy must be given the benefit of the doubt and must be treated as though he too had a soul.

Miss Cecilia handed over the children in good order. They joined their families and marched up the church aisle resigned to the long service they knew was in store for them. They reflected that since they could not be playing together they might just as well be in church. Heartily they joined

in the singing of the well-known hymns and patiently they sat through the long and unintelligible readings from the scripture. Then they knelt for the long prayer that always preceded the sermon. Usually this prayer meant little to the children. Heretofore it had been a time for idle dreaming or for sly winks at one another if they could peer around the intervening bulk of family.

But what was this? Was this prayer to be different from other prayers, one it would be impossible to sleep through, one that they could not even wink at one another over? One by one the children realized that the minister was deliberately telling the Lord all about their misdeeds of Saturday. Pitilessly and relentlessly he recounted their doings. Heartrending was his description of the awful agony of the poor mother whose babe was stolen. Sad

was the condition of the hard-working woman whose "garments" were taken from the line. Even the chops and the cheese were in the prayer, only it was not mentioned that the rats had already had a nibble at the cheese. The fire in the school house yard could only have been equaled by Hell fire, such a conflagration was made of it. The speaker's eloquence got the better of him. His voice rose until the poor trembling children were certain that their wickedness was known through the whole world. After painting them as black as any sheep could be, he proceeded to call them little lambs and beseech God to forgive them and save them. All things finally must come to an end and so did the prayer. The lambs looked anything but lamb-like as they raised their heads. They felt outraged. Their families were evidently embarrassed — all but Miss Mi-

nerva, who was at last satisfied, and the Major, who was as angry as a good-natured, even-tempered man could possibly be.

The good but misguided minister took for his text Miss Minerva's favorite verse about bringing up a child in the way he should go. The Major kept saying over to himself that there was no nagging in the jungle. He put his arm around Billy and drew him close to his side. Billy did not approve of hugging at home or in public but now he accepted the protecting arm with gratitude. He sighed audibly, then snuggled down close to his dear friend and tried not to listen to the sermon. Before the preacher had reached his fourthly, Billy was fast asleep, happy in the consciousness that the Major loved him even though he had been prayed for and preached at in church.

On the way home when his aunt stopped

to speak to a friend Billy asked the Major:

"Don't you reckon God knew all the time what we were doing yesterday, Maje?"

"Certainly, my son!"

"Well, then, don't you reckon it must have bored him mightily to have the preacher tell him all about it again?"

"I think it must have."

Billy laughed and said: "Say, Maje, don't you reckon Jimmy Garner thinks it is jes' as much a disgrace for mens to get prayed for in church as womens? He looks to me like he ain't got no mo' gas in him than a busted bal-loon," pointing to the dejected figure of his little friend

CHAPTER X

THE INVISIBLE FLUMPY

JOSEPHINE was no longer a baby. In a most astonishing and unaccountable hurry she had arrived at the age of three. The years had flown by on fairy wings, at least so they seemed to Miss Minerva, who felt herself growing younger rather than older. One must needs be young to keep up with such a sprite as Josephine, and Miss Minerva was doing her best to keep up. It required daily readjustments of her habits of thought, habits that had become almost as fixed as the solar system, but now must swing into a new and unknown orbit under the power of this little wild haired comet of a daughter.

Josephine was a precocious child. Every-

thing she did was done at an earlier age than most children. At ten months she said "Billy" and re-named Wilkes Booth Lincoln "Nicky." The Major she called "Daddy" and soon thereafter spoke quite familiarly of her mother as "Minerva," although that lady much preferred to be called mother. At a correspondingly early period she had cut a short row of pearly teeth and could turn a tune. She never deigned to crawl at all but discovered at a very early age what feet were meant for and used them forthwith. Not that she walked on them, not at all! Josephine always ran, or rather fluttered. So light was her step that one could not help feeling that she must be helping herself along with invisible wings. Her hair was as soft and fluffy as thistledown, as yellow as gold in the sun; her eyes dark brown, saucy at times but at times sad with a kind of un-

fathomed wisdom. She usually had her own way; not that she was ugly or headstrong; not at all; the family accepted the conclusion that her way was as good as any and she might just as well have it.

She reigned as queen in the children's realm from the time the gypsies stole her, and indeed it was her royal mandate that compelled Judge Turpin to shorten the sentence imposed upon those offenders. She screamed and wailed for Lina when Aunt Cindy rolled her out on the sidewalk in her carriage and nothing would comfort her but to have the proud little girl push her carriage in place of the old colored mammy. Of course the Major had to go to the Judge and sue for mercy but he always declared that Josephine had so instructed him.

All the children adored her, even Jimmy, although he pretended to consider her a

great nuisance. As for Wilkes Booth Lincoln, the emancipation of the negro was nothing to him. He boldly declared he "b'longed to little Missy." Likewise, he was deeply grateful to her for giving him another and a shorter name, one that did not cause quite so much hilarity as the old name his mother had seen fit to bestow upon him. The other children soon began to call him by his new name and gradually all the neighbors took it up. Nicky he was to be until the end of the chapter.

Josephine's precocity astonished everybody except Aunt Cindy, but nothing about that wonderful child astonished her devoted old nurse.

"Co'se she air smart — ain't I done learned her sense from the time she's bawn? If Miss Minerva'd had her way, the chil' wouldn't a been nothin' more than a animule, with 'bition jes' ter eat an' sleep,

but I wa'n't gonter hab no sich a goin's on if I could help it. I been a talkin' to her an' a singin' her chunes an' a teachin' her pretty ways from the fust beginning, an' now jes' look at her! Co'se they is somethin' in the ol' notion 'bout ol' folkses' chilluns bein' a leetle mo' apter than young folkses'. They do say as how the gumption what ol' folks air a been cumerlatin' kinder comes out in they antecendents. It air sho' furtumate it air the sense an' not their looks an' ways what air passed on. I'd sho' hate ter see little Josemphine's pretty brown eyes with spectickles on like her maw's — an' I'd hate ter see her mouf what looks like a ripe cherry a holdin' a pipe like the Major's. Sometimes whin I looks in the settin' room an' sees the Major a settin' there so plump an' smug jes' a smokin' an' a smokin' like a wet stump I wonder he ain't plum consumed. It sho' air a good

thing he done handed down his sense instid er his pipe an' his bow-belly."

There was one trait the baby had that no one could account for and that was a tendency to do what Miss Minerva called "lying"; Aunt Cindy called it "jes' foolin'"; and the Major called it "imagination." Just as the child had discovered all by her own process of reasoning that feet were meant to be walked on and that the wise used them for locomotion, so she discovered that words were meant to be formed into sentences, not just to gabble with. That sentences were intended to convey ideas she soon deduced, and having many ideas to convey, she immediately began to convey them.

She could hardly toddle when she announced one evening to her mother with the utmost gravity:

"Me done that!" pointing her dainty

finger at a glorious sunset. "Little Jo done it!"

"Not done, but did! Not Jo but Josephine!" corrected the mother. "What did my darling do?"

"Jo done all that pitty in the 'ky," paying not the least attention to her mother's corrections. "Me tooked Daddy's toof brush an' dipped it in stawbelly 'serves an' painted the 'ky."

"No, my darling, you did not paint the sky. God painted the beautiful sunset."

"Did you saw him, Minerva?" suspiciously.

"No, my dear, but —"

"Well me seed little Jo a paintin' it," triumphantly. "Me seed little Jo a doin' it when Minerva's back was turned."

How could the mother combat such evidence? She felt vaguely worried about it but the child was a tiny tot and surely

would outgrow such a trait. Miss Minerva prayed long and earnestly that her child should be truthful above all things. She talked it over with the Major, who poohpoohed the matter, declaring that his Minerva's child could not be anything but honest.

As Josephine grew so did her imagination. Many and wild were the tales she told. The amusing thing about it was that the child would always stick to her original tale. No amount of punishment, or rather threatened punishment, as it was a serious matter indeed if the poor mother really punished, could make her alter her original statement.

One of her pastimes was that she had a little dog who played with her on all occasions when she was alone. Now Miss Minerva did not like dogs and had always refused to let Billy have one and this

imaginary canine was almost as great an annoyance to her as a real dog would have been. Josephine called him "Flumpy." Where she got the name no one knew. She would race around the yard calling: "Here Flumpy! Here Flumpy!" She would throw a stick and say sternly: "Do det it!" and then go through all the motions of receiving it from her imaginary pet, patting him on the head and calling him endearing names.

"Don't you 'tep on Flumpy, Daddy!" she cried one day as the Major came up the front steps.

"All right, honey! Just show me where he is," laughed the Major.

"Daddy is you blind? Flumpy is layin' right in front of you."

The Major solemnly raised his foot up as high as he could and stepped over the supposed doggy.

"Dat's a good Daddy! When Flumpy has some puppies I'm gonter ask him to let you have one."

"Thank you, my darling! That will be mighty nice."

"Flumpy likes you, Daddy, but he ain't got no use for Minerva, 'cause Minerva is all time 'teppin' on his tail. Flumpy says he's gonter bite her some day. He wouldn't trus' her with one of his puppies for nothin'."

In due course of time the child came to the Major one evening after supper with her arm curved as though she held something pressed against her breast.

"Daddy, Flumpy says you kin have his bestes' puppy. He says he's sho' you will be good to it."

"What is that?" asked Miss Minerva.

"Flumpy done had puppies," stoutly announced Josephine. "He's pow'ful proud

of them puppies. Maybe he's gonter let Billy have one too."

"What nonsense!" exclaimed Miss Minerva. Billy giggled and the Major smiled indulgently at his little girl. "Joseph, you ought to be ashamed to encourage Josephine in this absurd fabrication."

The Major was sitting with his arm crooked as though the puppy were there. With his other hand he stroked its head.

"Listen, my darling," Miss Minerva said gently but firmly to the child, whose eyes were sad and big, "there is no such thing as Flumpy and if there were, a he dog could not have puppies."

Josephine shut her rosebud mouth until it was nothing but a red line in her dimpled face. She said nothing but turned away from her mother and went sadly into the corner of the sitting room where she kept her toys. The Major went on reading his

paper but Billy watched his little cousin over the top of his arithmetic. Josephine took up one of her dolls, unpinned the rag that had served as a shawl, shook her head

at its nakedness, put it back tenderly on the bed and covered it with the shawl. Then on all fours she began slowly crawling around the room. Very quietly the little thing played. Every now and then

she stopped and vigorously scratched her side, making funny little whining noises.

"Ohh — hhh!" gasped Miss Minerva, jumping up from her chair, upsetting her work basket and almost pulling the lamp off the table in her wild clutchings. "Ohh — ohh!"

"What is it, my dear?" cried the alarmed Major.

"Flumpy done bit Minerva on the leg," explained Josephine getting up from the floor. In her hand she clutched a large brass pin. "Flumpy done say he'd show Minerva he is a he doggy with puppies."

Even the injured mother perforce must laugh at the absurdity of the child.

Once Josephine made another assertion which her mother combated.

"But, Minerva," she insisted, "I 'member 'bout it, but 'course you can't 'member 'cause it was 'fore you were born."

"But, my darling, mother was born long before you were," said the literal Miss Minerva.

"Oh, no, Minerva! You is 'staken," politely. "I kin 'member jes' as well. I was all finished an' God had set me off to dry. I had my eyes in, an' my hair on, an' I was all dressed in a pink silk dress an' I looked over yonder an' there you were an' you didn't have on no wig an' your eyes hadn't been stuck in, an', Minerva," in a shocked whisper, "you didn't have on a rag er clothes."

The Major, who overheard this reminiscence, chortled with delight.

"Well, my dear, if the question should come up in court and little Jo could remember and you couldn't, she would be the winner."

The Major refused to treat the matter of his daughter's untruthfulness with any

seriousness. He considered imagination too valuable an asset to be nipped in the bud.

"She will get over it, my dear, so don't worry your head about it. She is truthful in fundamentals, I am sure."

The poor lady then took her troubles to Aunt Cindy.

"You must help me, Aunt Cindy, help me to break the child of this distressing habit."

"Lawsamussy, Miss Minerva, don't you fret yo' haid 'bout that there baby lam'. What infabricatin' she do don't 'mount ter a row er pins. She's jes' a foolin'. Co'se some folks gits growed up an' looks lak they don't know whar foolin' stops an' lyin' begins, but they is diffunt. Now Josemphine ain't ter say no teller of lies. A sho' nuf liar is allus a sayin' he didn' do what he done; but a pusson what

jes' makes out he done what he didn't do air jes' a infabricatter. I ain't hearn that baby chil' deny yit she never done somethin' she done did. She comes right out an' tells the Gawd's truf when you arskes her am she did it. 'Tain't no meanness in her, nothin' but jes' fancies."

"Do you really think so, Aunt Cindy? But shouldn't we try to make her stop making up such fearful tales?"

"Well, seein' as how she am a gal, it mought be bes' ter curb her some, 'cause gals ain't apt ter go inter no perfession lak lawyerin' or preacherin'. Ef I was you, Miss Minerva, I'd make her prove ev'y las' tale she gits off. That mought balk her some."

CHAPTER XI

RIDING THE ELEPHANT

ISS MINERVA determined to try Aunt Cindy's plan and she watched patiently for her little daughter's next invention. She did not have to wait long. The child had a book of large colored pictures of animals. She never tired of looking at them and having the Major tell her about them. The lion pleased her most of all the wild beasts. Her father must tell her over and over what the men, shown in the background of the picture, were to do with the guns they carried.

She came in the house one day and burst into her mother's room, her eyes shining and her fluffy hair flying.

"Minerva, Minerva, I done shot two big lions!"

"My darling child, I am sure you are not telling the truth! Where are the lions?" the mother asked, thinking this a good time to try out Aunt Cindy's plan.

"They're out by the hen house. They was a gonter steal all your hens and Billy's pony; an' they was gonter eat up Daddy when he got home 'cause he's so nice an' tender an' fat — an' I jes' up an' — bang! I hit him — "

"I thought you said there were two of them."

"Yessum! I hit him an' then I hit her!" triumphantly. "They was a lady lion an' a gemman lion."

"Are the dead lions there now?" asked the sorely puzzled mother.

"Yessum!" cried the child, delightedly. This was a new thing for her mother to be

questioning her about her imaginary exploits.

"Well, take me and let me see them," said Miss Minerva, gently.

Josephine took her mother by the hand and led her out in the yard. There was nothing behind the hen house but an old hen giving her brood the first lesson in scratching for a living.

"Now, my dear, see, there are no lions here. You have not told the truth. If you had shot two lions they would still be here."

Josephine cast up her eyes to the skies for inspiration.

"Well, Minerva, the buzzards mus' have et 'em up. Look, yonder goes a big buzzard now. Ain't that a joke on me?"

Miss Minerva felt that perhaps the joke was on her, but she did not say so. Instead of confessing herself beaten she took

the little girl by the hand and led her in the house, where she had a serious talk with her about the evils of untruth.

"And now, my darling, the next time you tell me an untruth I shall have to punish you. I am in dead earnest."

"Pank me?" questioned the child.

"Yes, spank you! I shall hate to do it, but I cannot let you grow up to be untruthful. A liar is an abomination unto the Lord."

"Pank hard, or jes' easy like?" with a show of impersonal interest.

"Hard, very hard! But my baby isn't going to lie any more. She is going to be a good girl, I am sure."

Josephine promised and kissed her mother and then danced off on her little winged feet.

* * * *

That night when she brought her pic-

ture book to the Major for him to read to her she turned the page rapidly when they came to the lions and insisted upon spending the whole time on the elephants.

"Lelephants is prettier than lions. Jo don't like lions no more. Tell Jo 'bout lephelants," she demanded, trying another pronunciation for the difficult word.

So her father told her wonderful stories about elephants, how huge they were and how they had saddles as big as a wagon top in which several children could ride on one elephant; how they loved peanuts and hated tobacco, and how afraid they were of tiny mice. Josephine listened with rapt attention.

"Me wishes Jo could see one er them lephelants," she sighed. "Jo wouldn't be scairt. She'd jes' clumb up on his back an' ride."

The next afternoon Miss Minerva went

to the sewing circle, which met that day at the home of a member who lived in the country. This entailed an early start and a late return. Josephine was left in Aunt Cindy's care.

"Stay with Aunt Cindy," said the mother as she kissed the child good-bye. "And be a good girl. You mustn't go out of the yard unless Aunt Cindy takes you."

"Not Daddy, if he takes me?"

"Of course if he takes you, but I am sure he won't be home until late."

It was quite late when Miss Minerva returned from the sewing circle. She hurried to her room to take off her hat and change her gown for supper. Josephine danced after her, her eyes shining and her hair fluffier than usual. Her hair always seemed to take on extra fluffiness when she was excited.

"Minerva, Minerva! Me's so glad

you've comed home. Me done seed a big lephelant when you was gone. Sho' nough, Minerva! A great big lephelant, with a saddle mos' as big as a teensy weensy house. An' me clumb up on the saddle an' tooked a ride. Jo wasn't scairt, not a bit scairt. The lephelant wasn't scairt neither, 'cause there wasn't no mice around."

Miss Minerva looked sadly at the child who danced around excitedly. She sat down and took her on her knee.

"My darling promised me not to tell another lie."

"Yessum, but this ain't no lie. Oh, Minerva, the lephelant was as big as you an' Daddy an' Sarah Jane an' Mammy Cindy an' Jimmy's legs all put together. An', Minerva, he blowed his nose in my hair. He loved me so that the mister man asked me to ride. An' the lephelant wunk at

me an' I wunk back at him — an' his eyes weren't any bigger'n blackeye peas."

"Josephine, what did Mother tell you, only yesterday, when you lied about the lions?"

"Yessum, but this is sho' nough. Thain't no buzzards done carried off my lephelant. He's too big. I'd ruther to ride on him than Brownie."

Poor Miss Minerva! She had said she would have to spank if Josephine lied again and now she must do it. It was the hardest thing the poor lady had ever had to do in all her life. Miss Minerva was nothing if not thorough, and though she disapproved of corporal punishment, when once she made up her mind to spank she spanked in good earnest.

"Now, never again must you say you saw an elephant and rode on him. Do you understand?" The tone was severe, but

the poor mother's heart was heavier than her hand had been.

"Ye-he-he-sum —" sobbed the child. She had tried hard not to cry, but Miss Minerva felt that when once a spanking

was begun it must be well and vigorously carried through. This was quite different from the gentle pats, almost love pats, that had befallen Josephine on other occasions, few and far between. The other

pats had been on her little pink palm and this was in quite a different spot.

The storm was over, the little face washed, pinafore changed and towsled hair brushed before the Major came home.

"Well, Minerva, didn't little Jo and I have an experience to-day? I believe I enjoyed it as much as she did."

"What was that?" asked his wife as she poured the tea.

Josephine in her high chair was seated on one side of the table and Billy on the other. Aunt Cindy had brought in the supper with an air of extreme hauteur. On her good old face rage and disapproval were plainly written. Wilkes Booth Lincoln, who was being trained as a butler in a diminutive white coat and apron, looked so sullen and angry that Billy whispered to him as he passed the biscuit:

"Gimme a ride on yo' lip!"

Billy had not been at home to hear of the spanking that had so stirred the resentment of Josephine's colored champions.

"Didn't Jo tell you?" asked the Major. "Why, honey, why didn't you tell your mother about our ride?"

"Don't tell her! Don't tell her, Daddy — she'll pank you!" screamed Josephine.

The Major laughed, not at all comprehending the situation.

"What are you talking about, Joseph?" asked his wife, a troubled look coming in her eyes.

"Why, Jo and I were taking a little walk — I had come home for a reference book and found her lonely and suggested that we go out and have a little time together. I didn't know about the circus parade, but it seems the show is to winter here and paraded to their winter quarters."

Miss Minerva sat like a frozen woman

and her mouth formed itself into a round O of horror

"Daddy, Daddy! Look out, Minerva's gonter pank you terectly, soon!" insisted Josephine. "Don't tell her you saw a lephelant. She done panked me for seein' it."

Here Wilkes Booth Lincoln dropped his tray with a loud bang and Aunt Cindy put her head in the door to hear what was going on. She was too absorbed in the white folks even to reprimand the boy.

"Not only did we see a huge elephant, but we rode on him."

"Jiminy crickets!" cried Billy. "And I didn't even see you I was so busy following the giraft! How did it happen, Maje?"

"Why, the elephant took a shine to Jo. They say elephants do that sometimes. He came close up to us and blew through his

trunk right in Jo's hair," said the Major.

"It was such a soft, nice trunk," said Josephine, looking fearfully at her mother and hoping that if she was to be spanked for saying so, the Major would have to get his first.

"And then the keeper, who is a Hindu, asked us if we wouldn't like a ride and let down a little rope ladder and up we went!"

Here Miss Minerva covered her face with her napkin and wept aloud.

"She cried when she panked me too, Daddy," whispered Josephine, "cause she said it hurt her to do it, but she's a gonter do it all the samey. I reckon you kin set in your leather chair afterwards, Daddy. I done tol' you not to say nothin' 'bout lephelants 'fore Minerva."

Poor Miss Minerva! She had to eat humble pie for her supper. Nobody had

ever heard her make a public apology before. But make one she did and quite gallantly.

Josephine received the amende honorable with all the airs of a queen.

"An' you ain't gonter pank Daddy, then?"

"No, my darling!"

"Not this time, Jo dear," laughed the Major.

"You'd better walk chalk Maje or you'll get it in the neck another time," said Billy. And then Aunt Cindy unbent and decided not to be angry with her mistress any more and Wilkes Booth Lincoln picked up his tray and grinned. Billy roared with delight and even Miss Minerva joined in the general merriment.

CHAPTER XII

WHO'S LOST A DAWG?

WHILE Josephine was growing from babyhood to childhood Billy was not standing still but shooting up like a bean-pole. As the baby cut her teeth Billy lost his, and then the time came when she cut her three-year molars at the same time that he cut his twelve-year ones, although he was only ten. The friendship between the cousins was strong and ardent. Billy was sure that his baby was the loveliest, most charming baby in all the world and little Jo looked upon Billy as a kind of superior being. That he was snaggle-toothed only added to his attractiveness in her eyes.

His second teeth were coming in strong

and even but there was still a gap in one spot.

"I wisht I had a cute little rat-hole in my mouf," said Josephine as she and Billy sat on the steps one afternoon.

Billy stuck his tongue through the gap and smiled at her.

"It's great to whistle through," he declared, showing her what a shrill whistle he was capable of. "I don't know what I'm gonter do when my tooth comes through and fills up the hole."

"Whatcher want?" yelled Jimmy, appearing on his own porch.

"Nothin'!"

"Well, whatcher all time whistlin' 'bout? I was mos' gettin' ready to study my gogerphy an' now I ain't gonter know it. You all time fixin' it so I miss my gogerphy."

Billy laughed and made no defense,

whereupon Jimmy crawled through the fence. Two palings were now missing to admit of this. Jimmy too had not stood still but had grown in both length and breadth, if not in vocabulary.

He let himself down gingerly on the step next to Josephine.

"What's the matter wif you, Jimmy? Is yo' daddy done spanked you so's you can't sit down?" she asked.

"Not on yer life! I'm too big to be spanked," swaggered Jimmy. "It's these blamed ol' pants. My mamma's all time makin' me wear tight pants when I come home from school. She's the savin'es' woman they is when she gits to makin' pants. I'd like to have some rubber breeches what would stretch. Sarah Jane says if I'd stop eatin' so much my pants wouldn't grow so little so soon, but Sarah Jane is crazy. What I eat don't go down in my legs and don't have nothin' to do with shrinkin' my pants. Sarah Jane is jes' afraid there won't be nothin' left for her to tote off to Benny Dick an' that no-'count husband of hers. She stands over me until I can't enjoy my eatin's. This mornin' when I hollered for more biscuit, what you reckon she said?"

"What?" asked Billy, who was always amused by the constant, friendly warfare

that existed between Jimmy and his mother's cook.

"She said I didn't eat biscuit but jes' drank 'em. How's Flumpy?" he asked Josephine, changing the subject without warning, a way he had.

"He's gone," sadly answered the child.

"Gone where?"

"Gone far away! Minerva won't let him stay here no more."

"Do you miss him much?" asked Jimmy. The older children had encouraged the little one in her make-believe and had even let Flumpy take part in their games.

"Yes, I'm so lonesome 'thout Flumpy, but Minerva didn't like him and he runned away."

"Won't she let him come back?"

"Some day she might," hopefully.

"What does Flumpy look like, Jo?" asked Jimmy.

"He looks like a doggy."

"Yes, but what kind of a doggy?" suggested Billy.

"A little doggy!"

"What color is he?" persisted Jimmy.

"He ain't colored. Flumpy's white as you is. He's whiter'n you is 'cause you is kinder blackish, Jimmy. Flumpy is whiter'n Billy an' me. His eyes is black like shoe buttons an' his tongue is red as — as Sarah Jane's stockings."

"Does Flumpy miss you too, Jo?" asked Billy sympathetically.

"Co'se he misses his own little friend. Flumpy is right sick a missin' me. He won't eat nothin' a tall an' he jes' cries an' cries."

"What did he do with his puppies?" asked Billy, wondering how long his little cousin would keep up her tales about the imaginary Flumpy.

"All Flumpy's puppies is dead. They didn't have nothin' to eat an' so they died."

"Gee! That was hard luck! Well, come along, Jo, and take a ride. Jimmy and I'll hitch up Brownie and you ask Aunt Cindy can you go."

A hat and jacket were quickly donned and the child was lifted up to a seat between the boys by the devoted Aunt Cindy.

"Now keep keer er her, Billy, an' don't you let that there Jimmy git a holt er the reims. You air liable ter tu'n ober if he gits ter monkeyin' 'roun'."

"Aunt Cindy is all time so bossy," was Jimmy's comment as they drove away. "I wouldn't let a ol' nigger boss me thataway for nothin'."

"Oh, Jimmy, nigger's a ugly word. Aunt Cindy's the bes'es thing. Me'n Billy loves her mos' as much as we do Minerva an' maybe we loves her a little betterer. W

don't never say nigger. Don't you know white folks always makes colored folks mad when they says nigger? Colored folks kin say nigger all time if they want to 'thout makin' theyselves mad but that's diffunt," declared Josephine with big eyes looking reproachfully at Jimmy.

Jimmy said nothing but looked a little ashamed of himself. Jo was the only girl he would permit to correct him. If Lina or Frances had dared to criticize him, bitter would have been his denunciation of those young ladies.

"Le's drive out by Tom Collins' house," suggested Jimmy. "Tom's all time got something new to show a fellow."

Tom and his father still lived in the tumbledown house on the edge of town. His father still got drunk, but Tom had grown to be such a big boy he was no longer afraid of beatings from his bibulous parent.

Not only did old Collins stand somewhat in awe of his son's size and muscle, but the Major had instilled in the mind of the old reprobate some fear of the law and the likelihood of its reaching out for him if he continued in his cruelty to his offspring.

Tom had at last learned how to read and was keeping up in his classes, thanks to his desire not to be left behind by Billy, whom he adored. He much preferred spending his time in the woods. The things he learned there were more interesting to the boy than the scanty knowledge he managed to glean from books. Lately, however, knowing how to read had suddenly become important.

Tom had discovered that from books he could learn many interesting things about the woods and beasts and bugs.

"Gee!" he had declared to Billy, "if

I'd a knowed that I'd a larned how to read years ago."

It was the good old Major who had opened up to the boy this land of knowledge. He had lent him many books on nature lore which Tom had assimilated with avidity. Where hitherto he had only guessed about the birds, insects and beasts he now had an exact knowledge.

The Major had also persuaded him not to swear so much. It was a hard pull for the boy at first, so accustomed was he to punctuate his every remark with profanity, but when the Major told him not to waste his oaths on trivial occurrences but save them to use on really important occasions, and to be sure that on those occasions there were no ladies present, Tom set to work to conquer the habit, and conquer it he did.

He was a handsome boy if one could see through the shock of black hair that hung

over his eyes and the smudge that often covered his face. His teeth were strong and even and his slow grin was most engaging. In his big hazel eyes were lurking shadows like those on a forest pool, as though the thoughts of the woods he loved were always pictured in his eyes.

Tom loved all living creatures and all living creatures loved him. Under the eaves of the tumbledown roof he called home he had many pet pigeons. The apartments in his martin box were always in demand by those fastidious birds, who want a clean house and want it to themselves. The negroes have a saying that martins will not stay on a place unless it is owned by aristocrats, but Tom and his martins disproved his theory. Certainly there was nothing aristocratic about old Collins, but who knows that the martins did not have some inside information concerning possible

Celtic kings who may have been the ancestors of Tom's Irish mother?

"Hi, there!" called Tom as the pony trotted up. "Stop! I've got something to show you."

Billy drew rein at the dilapidated gate.

"What is it?" demanded the boys in an eager chorus.

"Ain't you gonter give it to me?" asked Josephine, who counted Tom among her devoted subjects.

"Give it to you and have your maw gittin' after me? Not on your life!" declared Tom.

"My ol' man ain't at home, so git out," he continued hospitably.

The children clambered out, curiosity getting the better of the feeling that perhaps Josephine's mother would not altogether approve of her little girl's calling on the Collinses.

"Do you know of anybody who's lost a dawg?" asked Tom.

"I've lost one," spoke up Josephine quickly. "My Flumpy has runned away."

CHAPTER XIII

JIMMY LOSES HIS AGATE

TOM, not knowing that Flumpy was an imaginary pet, treated this bit of news quite seriously. Billy and Jimmy winked at each other and followed Tom, who had taken Josephine by the hand and was leading her to his workshop, where he kept his treasures.

Tom's workshop was fearfully and wonderfully made. He had built it entirely by himself of odds and ends that he had picked up on the dump-heap — that dump-heap so beloved of Billy's one-time goat. The workshop closely resembled the place that had given it being; indeed, a casual observer would have seen little difference.

Tom's first attempt at a workshop had

been an old piano box, but as his desires and skill grew he built from the old box outward and upward, keeping it as an inner chamber of the more lofty mansion. In building it is well to have something to nail to, and the piano box was an excellent foundation. Sometimes the material found was too thick to nail through, sometimes too flimsy; sometimes there were no nails to be found, and on such occasions Tom had just tied his walls together with bits of old wire. It took him many moons to complete that workshop. He worked on it with the fervor of the cathedral builders of old. He haunted the dump-heap to get first pickings when the wagons drove out from the town. A timely storm had unroofed a house, and when the rusty tin was carted out to the dump, Tom seized on it with the enthusiasm a poet might feel to whom inspiration has suggested a long-sought line. The roof

was on! At last he had a place where he could be alone, a place where he could keep his collection of butterflies and strange stones and rocks, a place where he could hide the books the Major lent him, and where he could read in peace without the interruptions caused by curses and flying bootjacks.

"Ain't that a cunning little raggedy house?" said Josephine. "I wisht I could live in a raggedy house."

Tom smiled happily, not at all minding the adjective applied to his house.

"I'm gonter put a real winder in some day. Sometimes folks send an old sash to the dump-pile. I ain't got nothin' now but a hole in the wall."

"I'll give you one of my sashes, Tom, the pink or the blue, whichever one you like bestes. Kin you make a window out of a sash?"

Tom explained the difference between a window sash and ribbon sash to the satisfaction of the little girl, thanking her all the same for her good intentions.

"Come in!" he said, proudly flinging wide the door, which was nothing but an old trunk top — a great find with hinges and even a piece of a lock still on it. "You havter scrooch down a bit to git in, but that's a good thing 'cause my old man ain't much on scrooching down, being as he's too stiff in the jints. Them's the inside shutters to my winder," he explained, bending back some rusty tin and disclosing the hole in the wall. "It's real snug in here an' jes' as dry as a bone. I'd sleep out here if it wasn't for my old man. He gits the willy-jims in the night sometimes and if I ain't there to wake him up he's liable to git a fit."

"Why don't you bring Willy Jim out

here to sleep with you?" asked Josephine, big eyed with this peep into a world quite different from her accustomed sphere.

"Aw, you all time can't tell the diffunce between willyjims an' sho' nough boys," said Jimmy scornfully. "Willyjims is the can't-help-its, ain't it, Tom?"

The interior of the little house-of-refuge was not quite so ragged as the outside. Tom had even made some attempt at beautifying his beloved packing box room. Tacked on the walls were some pictures rescued from his favorite treasure heap. In one corner he had made some rude shelves whereon were displayed shells, curious stones, bits of colored glass, pine cones, and finally a bedraggled mocking-bird Tom had rescued from the rats, and failing to preserve its life had attempted to preserve it in death. The result was not a success in taxidermy, but Tom cherished it

as the one perfect prize among his treasures.

"You say you lost a dog?" he asked. He was still holding little Jo by the hand. "What kinder dog was it?"

"Jes' dog with a little red tongue and some legs!"

"Look! I found a dog," laughed Tom.

In the corner of the old piano box, which served as a kind of inner shrine of his workshop, there lay as forlorn a canine specimen as one would ever see. It was a poodle, not more than two months old, evidently in the last stages of starvation. Its curly wool that was by nature white and silky was grey and bedraggled and full of burrs. Its eyes were closed and its tongue lolled out of its mouth.

"I believe it's dead," said Billy in an awe-struck tone. "Gee, ain't it a pity?"

"Tain't dead a bit!" cried Josephine. "It's as 'live as 'live. It's my Flumpy!

He's jes' a grievin' for me. Here Flumpy! Here Flumpy!"

The little creature opened his eyes and made an attempt to stagger to his feet.

"See, he knows me! Didn't I tell you my Flumpy had a little red tongue and some legs? Give me my Flumpy!" she demanded and Tom obeyed. The child sat down on a box and held the weak little creature in her loving arms.

"He couldn't eat," explained Tom. "I have tried and tried to make him, but he was too poorly."

"He's gonter eat for his little missus, ain't you, Flumpy?"

Somewhere from the mass of burrs and briars and bedraggled curly wool the puppy produced a diminutive tail which wagged feebly.

"He's done said yes with his tail," cried the delighted child.

Tom produced some bread soaked in milk and tenderly and lovingly the tiny creature was fed.

"He ain't able to set up to the table yet," explained the nurse, "but I have ter poke his befkus in his mouth."

Her method of feeding worked well and in a surprisingly short time the puppy was revived. He put out his tongue and licked the hand of his benefactress.

"Well, we've gotter be goin'," announced Billy. "If we get back late Aunt Minerva an' Aunt Cindy between them will raise Cain enough to whip Abel with. You'd better tell the little dog good-bye, honey, and come along," he said to Josephine.

"I ain't gonter leave my dog here," declared the little girl, every line and curve of her face and figure stiffening with determination.

"But, Jo, you know Aunt Minerva won't 'low you to keep a dog," expostulated Billy.

"Yes, you know Miss Minerva is the doggones' woman they is 'bout not lettin' little girls have dogs," put in Jimmy.

"I'll take good care of him here for you," promised Tom.

"I'm gonter take my Flumpy home with me. I tell you he's been a grievin' for me jes' like I's been for him. Ain't you, Flumpy?"

Another wag of the poor little tail. The beady black eyes were open now and gazing into the face of the child.

"Well, come along," said Billy with resignation. "I betcher I'm gonter catch it for lettin' you bring that dog home."

"But you ain't a lettin' me, I'm a doin' it myself."

The boys with amused toleration had

accepted the child's statement that the little waif was her imaginary Flumpy. They had their doubts, however, about how Miss Minerva would take this woebegone incarnation of the child's fancies.

On the drive home Josephine nursed her Flumpy with the tenderness of a mother. The little fellow snuggled contentedly in her arms and slept the sleep of hunger-appeased contentment.

"I sho' wanter see the fun when Miss Minerva sees the pup," whispered Jimmy to Billy over the head of the absorbed child. "I betcher she's gonter carry on worse than she did the time Jo rode the elephant."

"I'm powerful uneasy," confessed Billy, "but I reckon I'm foolish to worry, 'cause Jo kin git ahead of Aunt Minerva every time. Sometimes I feel downright sorry for Aunt Minerva 'cause she's such a hand to

let Jo seem to put her in the wrong."

When the children drove up in the pony cart Miss Minerva and the Major were out on the porch waiting for them.

"They make a pretty picture, don't they, Minerva?" said the fond gentleman.

"Ye-es — but — "

"But what?"

"I did hope I could bring my girl up to be a perfect lady and not such a little tomboy. Josephine much prefers romping with the boys to playing with her dolls."

"Tut, tut, Minerva! Jo is a natural, normal, healthy child. Don't try so hard to make a sissy of her," laughed the Major. "I would not have her different from what she is for all the wealth in the world. Look at her now! She is wonderful."

So she was. Her hat had slipped off and her hair shone like a halo. Her rosy face had an ethereal beauty.

"Minerva! Daddy! Flumpy's done come back," cried the child lifting up the sleeping puppy so her parents could get a full view of him in all his tangled filth.

"Billy, what does this mean?" demanded Miss Minerva.

"I reckon it means you done raised up a child an away she goes," suggested Billy judicially.

The Major said nothing, but lifted out the little girl, the puppy still in her arms. Miss Minerva's mouth was drawn in a tight line, and the childish countenance assumed a similar expression. For the first time the Major saw a decided likeness between his wife and his daughter.

"I bet on Miss Minerva," whispered Jimmy. "She's all time making little chilluns do her way."

"Whatcher bet?" responded Billy. "I betcher Jo keeps the pup. I betcher my

second bes' mouth organ Flumpy stays."

"I betcher my chipped agate," said Jimmy, the deal was closed and the two boys watched proceedings with an added interest.

"My darling," Miss Minerva's tone was gentle but behind it one felt, as it were, the mailed fist. "My darling, you know your mother does not like dogs and never allows them in the house."

"Yessum!" Josephine's eyes were filled with the sad wisdom that one saw sometimes in their brown depths. "Flumpy feels thataway 'bout you too, Minerva, but he done tol' me he's gonter try to feel diffunt."

"Josephine, this is absurd! I can tell you right now I do not intend to live in the house with a horrid little dog."

"Minerva, please don't say that," and now the brown eyes were filled with tears,

" 'cause me'n Daddy an' Billy sho' do love you. We'd jes' hate to have you go leave us. Flumpy's gonter love you too if you'll jes' stay. You ain't kissed me how-do since I got back, Minerva."

" Oh, shucks! " cried Jimmy. " I'm all time losing my chipped agates. I ain't never gonter bet on Miss Minerva no more."

The Major smiled and held the door open for Miss Minerva, Josephine and Flumpy to enter.

CHAPTER XIV

THE WINTERING CIRCUS

HE winter that followed was a memorable time for the boys of the town with a circus quartered almost at their doors. There was always the possibility — kept alive by youthful imagination — that at any moment a huge lion might break his bars and roam the streets, seeking whom he one in Frost's book of limericks which —

"Saw his chance to escape from the zoo.
He took it, you bet,
Or he'd been in there yet,
And then through the multitude flew."

At any rate the boys hoped some day something might get out and they would be there to see it. The girls were quite content to have bars between them and the wild beasts.

"I wouldn't mind a nice striped zebra," declared Lina. "They are so stylish. If any get out I hope it will be a zebra."

"Why, zebras is the kickin'es' things they is," said Jimmy, who had not outgrown his tendency to take issue with Lina on any and every subject. "Zebras ain't nothin' but striped mules, anyhow, 'cep'n they're meaner than mules even. Mr. Griggs says he'd ruther to meet a tiger any day than a zebra, an' Mr. Griggs knows 'cause he useter ride on his head bareback in a circus."

Mr. Griggs was the nice old man who kept the penny shop, much patronized by the school children. He had been a circus acrobat in his younger days and had followed the show in one capacity or another until old age had forced him to seek a less strenuous means of livelihood, but he had kept up his interest in the calling of his

youth. He boasted that he had two daughters and one son who did bareback turns, another son who was an expert performer on the flying trapeze, a son and daughter who could easily walk a tight-rope over Niagara Falls, and a son-in-law who was known as the Human Fly. He had six grandchildren, all of them following in the sure-footed steps of their forbears. It was because of Mr. Griggs' recommendation that the circus had selected that especial town as a place in which to winter. He had reported the climate as mild, the townfolk as friendly, the price of living as reasonable. What better name could a town have?

A huge old tobacco warehouse had been procured and fitted up to receive the animals. The coming of the circus had been kept very quiet. No advance agent had appeared heralding its approach with

flaming posters, and the knowledge that the circus was not only in their town but was to stay there for months had burst upon the children without warning. Who would live in any other town than theirs? The dreamed of delights of Memphis or Nashville, or even more remote places such as Louisville or St. Louis, paled to insignificance beside the wonderful fact that they had a circus all their own. It was not a very large circus, a one-ring show that visited only the small towns and villages, but it was good of its kind and quite large enough to furnish huge thrills to the children and darkeys.

The wintering circus did not seek publicity. The working force was lessened, the performers had scattered and the paraphernalia of the show was undergoing repairs. When this was made known to the children, great was their consternation, as

they had fondly hoped for a perennial performance with steam pianos, merry-go-rounds, popcorn and ice-cream-candy, and — poured around all — pink lemonade.

The disappointment was somewhat abated when they learned that the tobacco warehouse was to be opened every day for visitors and for ten cents any child could see the animals fed.

"I'm gonter go every day," declared Jimmy.

"How you gonter raise ten cents a day?" asked Billy. "Me and Wilkes Booth Lincoln don't get but ten cents a week. The Major is pow'ful free handed an' lots of times he digs in his pants an' finds nickels an' sometimes even quarters, but that ain't reg'lar. 'Tain't anything a feller kin count on. Wilkes Booth Lincoln gets his clothes an' his boa'd, an' every week the Major puts a dollar in the bank for him, but

he can't take it out till the Major says so."

"Gee whilikins! That makes fifty-two a year. That nigger is gonter be as rich as grease is by the time he's growed. Why don't he do the same by you? The Major's all time doin' more for black folks than he is for white."

"The Major explained it all to me. He says I've got what they call a long minority an' by the time I'm twenty-one it will be worth more than Wilkes Booth Lincoln's bank account. He says my father didn't have any other hairs. The last time I seen him he had lots of black hair, but I reckon the Major knows what he's talkin' 'bout."

"Kin you sell a long minority?" asked Jimmy with big eyes. "If you kin sell it maybe you might borrow something on it so you kin git to go see the animals feed every day. What does it look like? Is it down to the plantation?"

"I'd a mind to ask Maje, but somehow it looked like I didn't trust him. You didn't say how you were gonter raise a dime a day."

"Who, me? I'm gonter git me a job. I'm the workin'es' boy they is in this whole town."

"What you gonter do?" asked Billy.

"Do! Do anything!" with a swagger.

"Do what?" insisted Billy.

"I'd like to be a brakeman, 'cause they don't havter be all time washin' they faces, but my father says brakemen is all time gettin' they legs broke. I reckon I'll be a boot-black instead."

"What you gonter do about school?"

"Oh, shucks! You're all time remindin' people 'bout school jes' when they is havin' a good time forgettin' it. I reckon I could git up early an' black boots before I go to school — can't I?"

Billy only smiled, knowing full well that Jimmy was so hard to get out of bed in the morning that Mr. Garner had been known to pick him up and put him in a tub full of cold water without the formality of removing his night-shirt.

"How are Lina and Frances gonter raise the money? They are both of them busted buyin' mem'ry books. What do you reckon they want with them, Jimmy?"

"Don't want nothin' but foolishness! Girls is all time spendin' money on crazy things. They ain't fit to have money. I could have bought a hundred all-day suckers with that dollar a mem'ry book costs. There they are now a makin' up things to put in they ol' books. Hi, there! You, Lina'n' Frances! Me'n' Billy's gonter see the animals eat. We're goin' every day."

"Where will you get the money?" asked

Lina. "My mother says nice children wouldn't go too often the way common folks do."

"Pooh! You mean she don't want to cough up a dime a day."

"I want to go, but I spent all my money," sighed Frances.

"Me'n' Billy's gonter make some money," boasted Jimmy.

"How?" asked Frances. "Maybe Lina and I can make some too."

"We ain't jes' sho'. How will you an' Lina make it?" asked the wily Jimmy, knowing by experience that Frances had a gift for devising ways and means.

"We might get up a pin-fair — but there isn't any money in pin-fairs — Oh! Oh! Oh! I've got a scheme!" and Frances began to dance around, twirling on her toes like a top.

"What is it? What is it?" cried the other children.

A great whispering followed, the four young heads together in close conclave.

"We must let Wilkes Booth Lincoln in on it," said Billy, determined to see that his colored friend received his share.

"Certainly! We need Nicky to help work," agreed Frances.

"And surely we want little Josephine," said Lina.

"Aw, gee! We won't make nothin' if

we get so many in on it," objected Jimmy.

"Well, then, you stay out," suggested Frances.

"Stay out, your grandmother! Ain't I the one what got up the whole scheme? Ain't I the one what first said I was gonter make some money to go see the beasts every day? You all the time wantin' to get rid of the one what starts things, Frances Black."

"Josephine will help a lot," insisted Lina. "We can dress her up like a fairy or something and she will attract a crowd. She's so cute."

"We'll have it Saturday, because so many country folks come in to market," said Frances, the practical executive.

"Yes, and it's county court day too," Billy remembered.

"Gee whilikins! I betcher we make mos' a million dollars," cried Jimmy.

"Now look here," admonished Frances, "We've got just four days to get this thing up and every last one of us must work. I reckon we'd best not let the grown-ups know what we are going to do — "

"I can't deceive my mother —" began Lina.

"Who's gonter deceive her?" broke in Jimmy. "You all time sech a scairt cat, Lina Hamilton! You kin git out the comp'ny if you're so squeamly. If your mother asks you ain't you gonter make some money for to go to see the animals, and you say no when you is, that's deceivin', but it ain't deceivin' jes' to go ahead an' git rich 'tendin' to your own business.

'Ask me no questions, I'll tell you no lies.
Give me some apples an' I'll bake you some pies.'"

CHAPTER XV

A SALE FOR THE "PORE"

EVERY year the Ladies Aid Society held a rummage sale, thereby doing three worthy deeds in one: clearing out the rubbish from attics, cellars and store rooms, raising money for their church, and giving the poorer people the chance to purchase cast-off garments, old furniture, etc., for which they seemed to find some use.

The children had heard much talk of these rummage sales and had often wondered at the amounts raised by the Ladies Aid in those undertakings. Frances's plan was to have a rummage sale, only she called it a "rubbish" sale as did all the other children in perfectly good faith that that

was its proper name. The ladies always held their sale in a vacant store down in the poorer part of the town, but the children determined to have theirs in the open in a vacant lot next to the old tobacco warehouse where the circus had established its winter quarters.

"We'll catch the folks goin' to see the animals feed, and we'll catch market people, and it's close to the court house too," said Frances. "I wish we had a sheet to fix the pony cart up the same as we did that other time. Don't you reckon you might get one, Jimmy?"

"Not on yo' life! No mo' hookin' sheets in mine," replied Jimmy.

"They's two ol' awnings in our wood house," suggested Billy. "I reckon Aunt Minerva would lend them to us."

"Good!" was Frances's verdict, "but don't ask her until the day after. We can

make a booth out of one and put the other over the cart."

The week was a busy one for the children. School over and dinners bolted, they were off in the pony cart in search of rummage. They made a house to house canvass soliciting for their sale, being careful, however, to keep out of their own immediate neighborhood, feeling perhaps that their motives might be questioned.

"What is the sale for?" asked a kindly woman who had unearthed one rubber shoe, a pile of old paper patterns, a cracked water pitcher and a wash-boiler with a hole burnt in the bottom.

"For the pore!" answered Billy, solemnly.

The little girls looked sympathetic.

"What poor?" asked the woman, not willing to let her treasured rummage go until she knew more of its destination.

"Some pore little children — one of 'em is a orphan." Billy's eyes were sad.

"Well, I think you children are real kind to be working for them," she said, handing over her treasures.

"No'm, we ain't," declared Billy. "Anybody'd do as much."

Up one street and down another they went, the boys taking one side, the girls the other, and fearful and wonderful were the things they collected. Many times was the little pony cart filled and emptied. A place to store their goods had been a problem until Tom Collins came to their assistance. Tom had a job for the afternoons with the circus, having been recommended by Mr. Griggs. He came every day after school and helped clean cages and put in fresh straw for the animals. Tom said there was an old shed behind the warehouse that was doing nobody any

good and he saw no reason why it shouldn't be made use of. Permission was given by the manager of the circus for its temporary occupation and there the children piled up their plunder.

The great day came and to the joy of all it was a good day. The air was clear and crisp and the sun was shining brightly.

"Kinder like that day when we were kids when we stole the baby," reminisced Billy. "If it hader rained I don't know what we would have done."

The booth was constructed of boxes found in the shed. The awning was rigged up with the support of a friendly tree and a telephone post, Tom Collins helping, and proving of great assistance, since he had the experience of having already built one house.

Jimmy made the signs which he proudly displayed.

"I reckon I'm the best sign painter they is. My father is a architect an' that is the reason. He ain't gonter mind 'bout my takin' his card board an' Injer ink. My father is the bestes' natured person."

One sign reading "Rubish Sail," started out bravely with large thick, very black letters, but lack of space had compelled the artist to reduce the size of the letters, so that the last four were quite small and very crowded. Jimmy learned by experience, however, and on another sign, "Come By. Evything Cheep" he began quite modestly with small neat letters, only to find he had a great deal more room than he needed, and so had spread himself on the last four letters, making them large and bold. "For the Pore" was the best of all, even though the letters did run down hill a bit.

"They are real striking," said Frances, "but I don't see why you didn't ask some-

body how to spell the words you weren't sure of."

"Oh, you're all time so teachery, Frances Black. That spellin' is good enough. Mostly colored folks come to buy at rubbish sales, an' that's the reason I spelt thataway. Thain't no use in puttin' up signs folks can't read."

"I kin spell better'n that," said Nicky, "an' I's cullud."

"Well, you ain't a gonter buy nothin', is you? An' if you is you kin make out what I mean in those signs. That's what eddication does for folks. Eddicated folks kin read bad spellin' as well as good, but ignorant people can't make out nothin' but bad spellin'. I'm here to sell, not to spell."

The juvenile merchants had been careful to keep their respective families in ignorance as to their enterprise.

"'Tain't that we are doing anything

wrong," Frances explained to silence the wee, small voice that insisted upon whispering in Lina's ear, "but families are so prissyfied. If it is such a good, pious act for the Ladies Aid to have rubbish sales, why is it wrong for us to have them?"

"But they do it for the poor and heathen," objected Lina.

"If we ain't poor, what are we? I'll be the heathen too, if that will comfort you any. All I'd have to do would be to wear a skirt made out of hay and maybe put a ring in my nose."

"Well, I reckon you might catch cold," said the objecter seriously. Lina always took Frances's wild imaginings literally. "I tell you what let's do: s'pose we give a portion of our earnings to the poor, I mean the really truly poor. That would make folks say we were noble children."

"Oh, you're all time tryin' to beat the

Devil 'round the stump. Lina Hamilton," put in Jimmy.

"No such thing, Jimmy Garner — and besides I reckon my mother wouldn't let me play with a boy that takes the name of the Devil in vain."

"Oh, come on an' quit yo' fussin'," pleaded Billy. "I'm willin' to give some of my share to pore folks. If Jimmy ain't, let him keep his."

"I'll do what Billy does," said Wilkes Booth Lincoln.

"I meant all the time to put some of mine in my mite box," declared Frances.

"Well, we ain't made any yet," said Jimmy. "You kids all time dividin' up before there's nothin' to divide. I might put some in my mite box too. My father says that's the reason you call it a mite box — because you might put something in and then again you mightn't."

It was the usual thing for Josephine to spend Saturday morning with the older children. Miss Minerva trusted Lina and Billy to take good care of her darling and they were always faithful to their charge. So on this particular Saturday morning the little girl came along quite impressed by the important part she was to take in the great sale. As Lina had decided that it was too chilly to dress the child as a fairy, Frances decreed it would be quite a drawing card to have her enact the part of a poor little orphan. A particularly ragged shawl was accordingly extracted from the rummage and this was put over her head and pinned under her chin, her chubby face looking quite wistful in its dingy frame. Pinned to her back was a sign:

Help the Pore Orfen

"Now you must look sad all the time,

honey," admonished Frances. "If you feel giggly, turn your back on the crowd."

"Where is the crowd at?"

"It will be comin' soon," encouraged Billy. "The town is jes' full of folks. It looks like country niggers kin smell wild animals for mos' a hundred miles."

The youngsters had been busy sorting out their wares and putting on the price marks. There was much wrangling over those same prices, as it was difficult to come to an agreement as to the value of the different articles. The booth was piled high with old clothes, shoes, hats, broken crockery, bent and leaky pots and pans, old books, worn carpets and rugs. Some of the things were quite good, the donors being inspired either by a desire to help the poor or by a dislike for the articles they contributed. There was one handsome odd andiron which Wilkes Booth Lincoln

cleaned until the large brass ball at the top shone like the sun. There was a pretty china teapot with nothing at all the matter with it except it dribbled at the spout. There was one otherwise perfectly good rocking chair that had a habit of turning over backwards. This had been donated after it had broken grandmother's collar bone. It was decided to ignore the chair's past and to put a large price on it.

Their first customers were two young ladies who were passing on their way home from a shopping expedition.

"I didn't know there was a rummage sale on to-day. What church is it?" asked one of them.

"No church at all, ma'am," answered Billy, raising his cap politely. "It's jes' for some pore children."

"How sweet!" enthused the young ladies. Billy certainly had a way with

him that appealed to the opposite sex.

"And look at that poor little child in the ragged shawl!" said one of them.

"Let's buy something, Kate."

"Why, here is a brass andiron exactly like one in our attic, except ours is all rusty and tarnished. We never could find the mate and here it has turned up. I am going to buy it this minute. How much is it?"

"One dollar, miss," said Billy examining the price tag. "Kin you carry it? If you can't we've got a delivery boy. Here, you Wilkes Booth Lincoln, you take this home for the ladies."

The ladies were so delighted at the appearance of the cart with its striped awning and the spry little groom that they decided to get in with the andiron and be driven home by the grinning Nicky. They did not live far from the scene of activities

and the little colored boy was back in a few minutes.

"They done gib me a quarter," he said. "I reckon them ladies is gonter be some disappinted when they finds out they done bought the same ol' fire dog what they maw gib us only yestiddy."

"Didn't you tell them?" asked Billy, horrified at the outcome of their first sale.

"Naw, sho' I didn't tell 'em. They was so pleased wif it I couldn't bear ter be the one ter break they hearts. Here's the quarter ter go in the baccy box.

An old cigar box was being used as a cash register.

"But that is yours," said Frances, who was cashier. "The young ladies gave it to you."

"That don't make no mind ter me," insisted the little colored boy. "I done yearned it while I wa' a wuckin' fer the

firm an' it b'longs t' the whole passel of us."

"Well, Nicky, all I have to say is you are much more gentlemanly than some white boys I could name," said Lina, looking meaningly at Jimmy, who was already calculating with a stick in the dirt how much a dollar and a quarter was when divided by six children.

Jimmy may have been short on manners, but he had a talent as a salesman. As the news spread through the lower parts of town and in the market place that a rummage sale was being held the children soon had a crowd around their booth. Jimmy. mounted on a barrel, began to cry his wares.

"Come one! Come all! Here is something cheap! Here are coats and hats, shoes, table ware, carpets and rocking chairs. Here's a gum-shoe," holding up the huge odd rubber. "Here's a gum-shoe without a break. Who wants a gumshoe?"

RUBISH SALE
HELP THE PORE

"'Tain't nobody wants one gum-shoe," declared a scornful one.

"Nobody? Well I betcher thain't a person here who hasn't got a odd gum-shoe to his house. Why don't you buy this one to fill out the odd one."

"Well, that's sense," said a man who stopped a moment to listen to the amusing speech Jimmy was making. "I have one myself. I've a great mind to buy this one if it fits me." He was a large man and the rubber did fit him. He paid the quarter asked and carried off his prize.

"Good Gawd!" cried Wilkes Booth Lincoln in a whispered aside to Billy. "That there gemman wa' Mr. Robinson what libs out yander in the subbubs, an' it wa' his own wedded wife what done gib us that there gum-shoe."

Billy's instinct was to run after the purchaser of the odd rubber, but the humorous

side of the situation was too strong for him and he refrained. The sales continued and the children were busy making change and wrapping up purchases. Jimmy having found what he could do best, kept on doing it. No doubt if Miss Cecilia could have heard him as he made his rollicking speeches she would have changed her mind about his being a preacher in embryo and realized that his profession should be that of an auctioneer.

"Here's a coat — a perfectly good coat — good cut — good style — good cloth — and the price is only fifty cents. The buttons on this coat — the buttons alone would be worth fifty cents. Here, try it on, Sam!" he cried to a grinning darkey who had pushed up close to the young merchant as he stood on his barrel haranguing the crowd.

Sam slipped his arms in the coat.

"Some fit!" he said, squaring his shoulders and strutting a bit. "I reckon I'll take it, boss."

"Take it, an' you'll be sorry," whispered another colored youth who had had a covetous eye on the same coat, which was a bright blue with a decided yellow pin stripe. "'Tain't nothin' but moths."

"Moths, do you say?" yelled Jimmy, "Moths! Nothin' but moths! Well, what do yer expect for fifty cents? Do you think you could get mockin' birds for fifty cents?"

The crowd laughed at this retaliation of the irate Jimmy. Sam put down his fifty cents and went off wearing the coat.

The cigar box was growing heavy. The sale was succeeding beyond their wildest dreams. The little cashier had no time to count their earnings, but she had stuffed in her shoe for safe keeping at least twenty

dollars in greenbacks. The till was running over with silver and copper coins. The rummage was greatly diminished, but not so the crowd.

"We could have sold ten times as much as we have got," sighed the cashier.

"Yes, an' the train is in an' I betcher some of the folks are comin' up this way to see the animals an' there is no tellin' what they won't buy," said Billy, who had been selling as much as Jimmy, if not quite so spectacular in his methods.

CHAPTER XVI

AUNT PERUNY PEARLINE AND FAMILY

BILLY, look yander! If that ain't my mammy an' all the chilluns, at leas' pretty nigh all er them. Lordy! That mus' be 'Postle Peter an' 'Pistle Paul done growed so big they is got on pants. Who's that Alice Ann Step-an'-Go-Fetch-It is a carryin'? Billy, do you reckon my mammy is done kep' on a multiplyin'?"

Wilkes Booth Lincoln darted through the crowd as soon as he had unbosomed himself to Billy, crying:

"Mammy! Mammy! Here I is! Here Billy is! Here's Miss Minerva's baby!"

"Well, Gawd in Heaben! If here ain't Wilkes Booth Lincoln!" exclaimed Peruny

Pearline. "An' ain't he growed? I never would a knowed you, chile."

Her tone was far from maternal, but then Peruny Pearline's attitude towards her offspring had always been somewhat casual. She seemed to feel that in bringing them into the world she had discharged her duty and it was up to her mother, Aunt Blue-Gum Tempy, and her daughter, Alice Ann Maria Dan Step-an'-Go-Fetch-It, to take up the work where she left off.

"I'm pow'ful glad to see you alls," said Wilkes Booth Lincoln wistfully. His mother gave him a perfunctory kiss, but Alice Ann made up to him for it by taking him in her arms and giving him a great bear-hug, first carefully depositing on the ground the bow-legged baby she was carrying.

"Lawd, Wilkes Booth Lincoln, I is missed you somethin' turrible," she said in

a voice quite like Nicky's. "You is wuth all the others put together. I allus been a tellin' Granny you is."

"Where is Granny?" asked the boy.

"She done have ter stay behim ter lay out Uncle Pill-Jerk Peters las' wife, Aunt Rosy."

"Is she daid — Aunt Rosy?"

"Not ter say daid an' gone, but she am a breathin' her las'," solemnly. "Granny sho' did hate ter miss comin' on this here trip. They do tell us they's got a rimernosterous in this here show. Granny ain't never seed a rimernosterous an' she sho' is concerned to see one."

"Whose is that there baby?" asked Wilkes Booth Lincoln, pointing to the bow-legged infant who stood clinging to Alice Ann's skirts.

"Mammy's, of co'se! Ain't you hearn tell er him? He's mos' a year ol'. Doc

Shacklefoot done name him Mira-Bell-Dick-Two. I jes calls him Dick, cause all that there name ain't no sense in it, specially two when they ain't but one er him — an' Mira an' Bell is bof gals' names. He's a right good baby, as babies go, but I is sho' tired er nursin' nigger babies."

In the meantime Billy was shaking hands with his old plantation friends, who made much more over him than they did over their own flesh and blood.

Admiral Farragut Moses the Prophet Esquire — Mose for short — was almost grown. He was evidently his mother's favorite, the only one of all her many children who had inherited her Indian looks, of which she was inordinately proud. He had the same erect bearing, straight hair and high cheek bones. He wore a bright blue suit with very full peg-topped trousers, and a coat that came almost to his

knees. (One often wonders where on earth the negroes find such suits.) Mount Sinai Tabernacle and First Thessalonians had not come because they had a leaning towards funerals and were afraid Aunt Rosy might be daid an' buried before they got back from the 'scursion. Oleander Magnolia Althea had grown to be a great girl. She had peculiarly intelligent eyes, but a sullen expression was habitual on her otherwise rather handsome countenance. Perhaps she resented having to wear her mother's cast-off finery.

"I hope yo' seven-year itch is better," said Billy politely.

"I done got it charmed off'n me las' year," she answered, flattered that Billy should have remembered it. "Besides greasin' all over with lard an' sulphur."

Gettysburg and Biddle-&-Brothers-Mercantile-Co. were there in all the grandeur

of Fauntleroy collars, paper base-ball caps and women's button shoes with high run-down heels. The two boys were older than Wilkes Booth Lincoln, but no older than tired Nature could stand, their three birth-

days coming within twenty months. They looked with envious eyes on their younger brother, who was dressed quite as well as Billy in a neat suit with a Norfolk jacket and gorgeous copper-toed shoes.

Decimus Ultimus, who had been the baby when Billy left the plantation, was now a nice little girl of five or thereabouts. She had on a rough-dry pink dress and her pig tails tied up with three huge pink bows. Postle Peter and Pistle Paul, the twins, were an attractive pair, viewing with big-eyed wonder this new brother of whom they had heard but little, and Billy, of whom they had heard a great deal. In fact, Billy's name was used as a bribe for goodness. If they behaved very well some day this wonderful Billy might take them to live with him as he had done the brother. If they were bad they would go to Hell where there would be no Billy.

Mirabile Dictu, the latest baby, was big-headed and bow-legged, but Alice Ann, his faithful caretaker, declared he was the best baby it had been her lot to bring up. Poor little Alice Ann felt her vicarious mother-

hood grievously. Faithfully she looked after her mother's progeny, doing her best to keep them clean and healthy, but there were times when she longed to be free; longed to be able to dress up and go out for a good time without a baby in her arms.

"I ain't a sayin' I don't lub 'em," she said to Billy. "They is my own flish an' blood, but they is sech a passel of 'em. Co'se I wa' glad that lil Dick wa'n't twinses. Postle Peter an' Pistle Paul 'bout done fer me. They didn't do nothin' at the same time but git bawned. They couldn't even git the measles together. They maught as well a been sexagissimas fer the trouble they give me."

The rummage sale delighted the souls of Peruny Pearline and her large family. Immediately they began to buy, producing from various hiding places their hoarded wealth. Peruny Pearline had hers in her

stocking, where it stuck out like a great wen. The twins carried their pennies in their mouths and Alice Ann had hers knotted in a salt bag.

Bonnets and caps, shoes, stockings, old coats and trousers were fitted on the assorted sizes and purchased in a twinkling.

"Gimme that there pitcher, too," demanded Peruny Pearline.

"It's cracked," whispered Billy, not willing to profit on his friends.

"That don't make no mind to me," declared the would-be purchaser. "I wanter use it fer a grabe stone for Second Thessalonians. I'll plant a jiranium in it an' low it'll look real smart."

It was a handsome pitcher with much green and gold filigree and except for a crack across the bottom was in good condition.

Billy was loath to accept pay for the

quantity of rummage his plantation friends bought, but the business did not belong to him alone and he could not put it up to his partners to give away their wares. He determined, however, to make it up to his colored friends in some way. Peruny Pearline had cleaned up the last of the rummage. It was not quite eleven o'clock and every stitch of old clothes, every bit of cracked china, even the rocking chair, that had been the means of breaking Grandma's collar bone, was sold. Peruny Pearline had bought the chair, insisting that Mose could easily carry it back to the plantation on his head.

At eleven the doors to the old tobacco barn were thrown open and the crowd could surge in at ten cents a head and see the animals for as long as it wanted to. Billy determined to stand treat for the occasion.

"How much did we make?" he

demanded of the happy but weary cashier.

"I haven't counted yet," said Frances, her eyes shining with excitement as she began to pile up silver and copper according to its denomination. "I've got twenty dollars in my shoe, an' it surely does feel uncomfortable."

A rapid calculation revealed that the sale had netted thirty dollars. That made five dollars apiece for the children, as they had voted to let Josephine have a full share in the profits since she had proved such a wonderful advertisement, doing the poor little orphan like a born actress.

"Fer Gawd's sake don't let on I'm in on this, Billy," begged Wilkes Booth Lincoln in an agonized whisper. "Mammy'll take ev'y las' cint from me if she knows it."

Billy promised and warned the other children. The money was carefully divided to the last penny and stuffed in burst-

ing pockets, Billy taking charge of Nicky's share, while Lina took care of Josephine's, all but a few nickels and dimes which the child was allowed to put in her own diminutive pocket. The awning was taken down and the shop was closed.

"Gee! Hasn't it been great?" sighed Jimmy. "I reckon I'm the inventin'es' boy they is in Tennessee to think of makin' money with a rubbish sale. I'm all time got mo' inventin' schemes."

"You sure *are* great on inventions," said Frances, but her sarcasm was lost on the self-satisfied James.

"There is no use arguing with such a prolific imfabricator as Jimmy," said Lina scornfully, as she unpinned the old shawl from Josephine's head and put on the child's hat and jacket.

"Gee! We done forgot to sell that shawl," cried Jimmy, jumping up again on

his barrel and yelling lustily: "A beautiful warm shawl for sale! Who'll buy? Who'll buy? Ten cents for a nice warm shawl!"

"I'll take it," said Peruny Pearline, again searching for her unready money. "I reckon Granny would be right proud to have it."

"You can keep the ten cents," said Frances loftily when Jimmy handed it to her as cashier. "I'm tired of doing 'rithmetic. Ten cents divided by six is too much work for Saturday — and besides I'm going to go in to see the animals now."

CHAPTER XVII

THE AFFECTIONATE SUSAN

RIGHT royally did Billy treat, paying the entrance fee for the whole contingent from the plantation, besides buying each one of them a huge, pink, sticky ball from a popcorn vendor who stood outside the door. Peruny Pearline accepted the favors with calmness, but she managed to reduce the expenses somewhat, as an afterthought.

"Here, Mose, tote Deci. Thain't no use in Billy's givin' up a ten cent dime for her. Oleander Magnolia Althea, you pick up Postle Peter; an Gettysburg an' Biddle, you kin manage Pistle Paul between you, an' don't you dare ter drap him. Now Decimus Ultimus you squinch down little

so the man at the do' won't go an' be 'clarin' you is big enough ter walk."

And so they made their triumphal entrance into the tobacco warehouse, the dealers in rummage crowding in in their wake. Josephine, attracted at first by the gorgeous pink bows on the wrapped plaits of little Decimus Ultimus, had fallen completely in love with the colored child and as soon as they got beyond the dread man-at-the-door and Mose had put his burden on her own feet, colored and white came together and swore eternal friendship.

With black hand locked in white the two children viewed the animals with shining eyes.

"This is a lion," explained Josephine. "I haven't never seen one 'cept in books. Ain't he sweet?"

The lion obligingly yawned as the children crowded close to the railing.

"What he do dat fer?" demanded Deci, who was a living interrogation point.

"I reckon he's tired. Maybe the monkey's been a playin' tricks on him." The lion yawned again, that time emitting the rumbling preliminary to a roar.

"I done seed plum' down his gullet! I's scairt he mought eat me up," tremblingly whispered Deci.

"He ain't gonter touch you," assured Josephine. "He's the nices' lion. That time I rode the lelephant the man tol' me that the lion wouldn't hurt nobody for nothin'," but at this point the roar that the lion had been preparing to give came with all the force of which he was master. A lion's roar is a fearsome sound even when one knows that the iron bars are strong. The pink bows on Deci's pigtails trembled like aspen leaves and her face became ashen.

"I wisht I'd done stayed home with Gran'mammy," she wept. "I ain't never been et up by a lion yit down with Gran'mammy."

"Ain't no lion gonter eat you," comforted Josephine. "Look, here comes the man with the lion's lunch! If that lion starts to eat you I'll tell him to eat me first an' you can be a runnin' away while he's a eatin' me."

Such self-sacrifice quieted Deci's fears and she was able to compose herself and watch the lion dispose of his luncheon. The keeper made the beast go through a few tricks before he fed him, much to the delight of the crowd.

Then Deci began again:

"What he do that fer? What he eatin'? What dat ere lion's name? What fer dat ere lion got a crack frough he mouf? He look lak he got two facetes. Who done

skint he tail an' put a lil torsel on the tip en'?"

Josephine was not at all abashed by the rapid fire of questions but answered them glibly. If she didn't happen to know the answers she readily improvised satisfactory information.

"Whar dat lion's paw? Whar he maw? Ain't he got no brudders an' no sisters? Whar he sleep? What fer he put he nose on he foots? Ain't dat man scairt he eat him up whin he go in he coop? Don't dat lion nebber git out an' peruse aroun'?"

"Look at dem big pole cats!" cried out Deci as they moved on to the cage where two tigers were walking restlessly up and down behind the bars. "I 'low we'd better be keerful how clost we gits ter dem dar pole cats. What makes dem pole cats so prancified? They sho' do look spiteful out'n dey eyes. I's skeerter er dem dan I is

er de lion. Is you scairt? Is you a gonter let dem et you up fust too?"

"Of course, but they ain't pole cats — they're tiger cats, 'cause my daddy showed 'em to me in my book."

"Do them tige cats like dey coop? Ain't dey got no lil baby tige kittens? What dat ere curus lookin' critter in dis nex' coop?"

It was the rhinoceros, and for a moment Josephine was nonplused for an answer.

But Deci chattered on:

"He look a lil lak a bull an' a lil lak a hawg, an' he look kinder lak some ol' stump what been pull up by de roots. I's kinder skeert he am a hant an' ain't no sho' nuf nothin'. What make he horns grow out'n he snout?"

Josephine was loath to confess her ignorance of the nature of the strange beast, so she listened carefully to the comments of

the older persons who were gazing in awe at the hideous creature.

"Great Gawd in Heaben!" cried Alice Ann. "If this here ain't the rimernosterous! Ain't that what it spells on the ticket, Mose, there on the front of the cage? I sho' do wisht Granny had er come. They's plenty er corpses ter lay out in this worl' but they can't be mo'n one er sech a lookin' monstupendous critter. I don't see how he kin stan' hisse'f. I reckon he ain't nebber seed hisse'f er he'd a jes' died er shame."

"It's a rhinoceros," whispered Josephine to her newly made friend. "I kinder forgot what he was at first, but now I 'members."

"That's a camel," continued Josephine as they made their way to the far end of the hall. "Camels is kind an' good. They don't never bite nobody, nor scratch, nor growl, nor nothin'. The reason they is so

sad-eyed is 'cause they can't never get to Heaven. That's in the Bible. I reckon they can't never get there 'cause they have such big humps on their backs an' the pearly gates ain't high enough."

"What dis lil striped pony?"

"That's a X Y Zebra. Mr. Griggs says he kin kick worsen a mule. If I was the camel I'd get him to kick me plumb over the pearly gates long as I couldn't get through 'em. Here's my lephelant. He's gonter get in Heaven 'cause he's so nice an' soft an' squashy he kin squeeze in."

"Is dat ere beas' sho' nuf yo's? Who gib him ter you? What he name? Do he know he b'longs ter you?"

"Yes, he's mine an' he gave hisse'f to me. His name is Susan an' of cose he knows he b'longs to me. Hello, Susan!"

The huge old elephant, who was engaged in picking up hay with her trunk and put-

ting it in her mouth, stopped eating, flapped her great fan-like ears and slowly turned her head when Josephine's high sweet voice called out its greeting. Immediately she raised her trunk and blew in the child's hair just as she had done on the other memorable occasion.

"Ain't you mine, Susan? Didn't you give yo'se'f to me?"

Susan clanked her chain and waved her ears. Old Mr. Griggs, who was standing near by, laughed and said:

"Susan means yes, my child. She belongs to you if love can bind."

The darkeys who were crowding around the elephant's enclosure pushed back in fear. This thing of having an elephant reach out with its trunk was not part of their idea of having a good time and more than their ten cents admission had paid for.

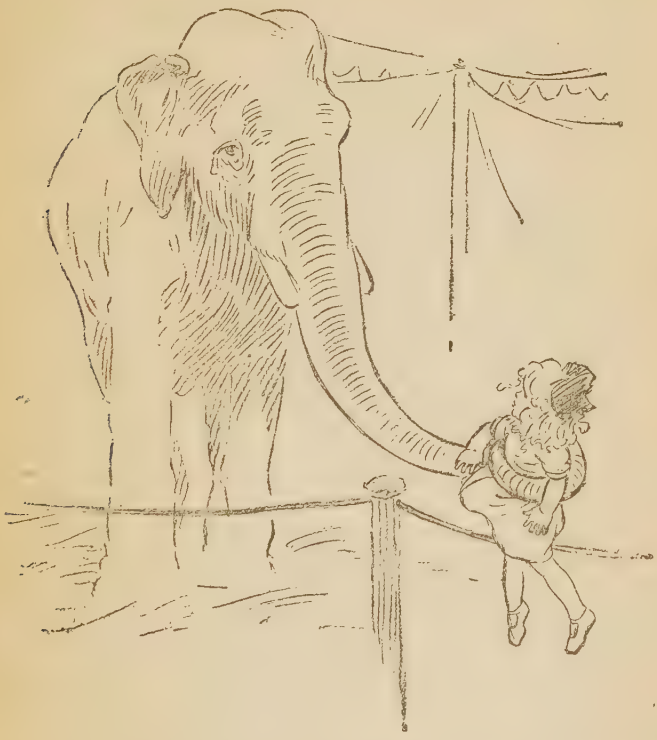
Just then Billy and Jimmy, who had

been frozen with fascinated horror in front of a cage where the great snake had been having his infrequent meal of live rabbits, made their way to the elephant. They saw Susan caressing the little girl with her soft trunk. Billy's instinct was to snatch his cousin out of the elephant's reach, but when he saw the child's utter lack of fear and extreme happiness in being the recipient of this strange embrace he held back.

"Look at that ol' fool elephant!" exclaimed Jimmy. "You oughter make Jo move, Billy. She might get et up. Elephants are all time eating up little girls. Move, Jo! Move!" he cried.

Susan looked at Jimmy with scorn in her small, intelligent eyes. Josephine put out her hand and softly stroked the friendly trunk. A tremor went through the old elephant's frame very much as we might see at any time when a dog is being petted by

his beloved master. Suddenly her trunk was curved around the child's waist and to



the horror of the bystanders Josephine was lifted in mid-air and swung softly.

Decimus Ultimus screamed and tried to get through the crowd. Billy turned as white as a sheet and Jimmy as red as a beet.

"Be quiet!" sternly admonished Mr. Griggs. "The child is as safe as she would be in her mother's arms."

The panic-stricken people were silent, gazing in awe at the little girl who was still being gently rocked by her huge friend. Her face was wreathed in smiles and she was no more frightened than she was when the Major tossed her up to the ceiling, which he did every day when he came home from his office. She waved her hand to Billy and then the color came back into the boy's white face.

Susan's keeper then made his appearance with more hay for his charge. The man's face was a study worthy of note if any one in that crowd could have taken his

eyes from the child. He was a Hindu with swarthy skin, flashing white teeth and great black eyes. A kind of ecstacy was expressed on his counte[illegible] as he looked at the old elephant fondling the fair-haired child.

"I have seen it! I have seen it!" he muttered, but his words were Hindu and nobody but Susan knew what he was saying.

What he had seen was an elephant which had, as it were, fallen in love with a child. Persons wise in elephant lore will tell us that those strange intelligent creatures have their loves as well as their hates and when they love they love forever and when they hate they hate always. Fortunately for circus-going mankind they do not often show their affection as Susan was doing in swinging Josephine back and forth.

Just then the Major came in the door. He, too, was struck dumb when he saw his

little darling being loved by an elephant.

The Hindu keeper clapped his hands and gave a sharp order in his own language. Susan then raised the child aloft and gently deposited her on her huge old head, still carefully holding her with her curved trunk. There Josephine sat and laughed down at the crowd. She saw the Major and realized that he was frightened.

"Don't be scared, Daddy," she shrilled sweetly. "I'm jes' having a game with Susan," and she patted one of the fan-shaped ears.

Again a tremor rippled over the elephant's great frame.

The Hindu clapped his hands and gave another order. Susan lifted the child down and placed her on the outside of the roped enclosure as gently and tenderly as Miss Minerva herself could have done it.

"Good-bye, Susan," Josephine called;

"I'm comin' to see you mos' every day," and then she ran to the Major.

The crowd that had been breathless during the performance that beat any circus act they had ever seen for thrills, now broke out in a murmur of applause.

"I betcher I wouldn't a let that ol' fool elephant pick up my little sister if I hader had one," said Jimmy, sticking out his tongue at Susan, being careful, however, to stand out of reach of her trunk.

Susan looked at him steadily, but her eyes took on an amused expression and broke into tiny wrinkles at the corners. The keeper had just filled her great drinking tub with fresh water. With her twinkling eyes still on Jimmy she put her trunk in the tub and the water in it was perceptibly diminished in a moment. Suddenly Jimmy found himself deluged. A fireman with a hose could not have directed a surer,

stronger stream of water than did the humorous Susan.

The crowd screamed with joy at the discomfiture of poor Jimmy, who did not know whether to laugh or cry and being in doubt decided to laugh. As for Susan, she turned her back on the audience and rocked to and fro. No doubt she was enjoying herself in her own elephantine way.

CHAPTER XVIII

UNCLE JIMMY-JAWED JUPITER

AJE, I got a whole passel of friends come to town," Billy announced to the Major as soon as the excitement of the elephant had subsided. Billy was in a quandary as to what to do about Peruny Pearline and her many offspring. His instinct was to ask all of them to go home with him, but when he looked at them and realized what a large contingent there was and what it would involve in the way of explanations to Aunt Minerva and Aunt Cindy, he hesitated. He was ashamed to confess that in his heart of hearts he wished that his little cousin Josephine would think of extending the hospitality of her home to his dusky friends. Josephine was so young

she could do things at which he, of maturer years, must hesitate. When he saw the Major he decided he would put it up to him to do the right thing. The right thing he felt would be to treat his plantation friends when they came to town as they would treat him had he gone to the country.

The Major, it seems, had got wind of the rummage sale in the vacant lot and from the description of the children and pony cart suspected the identity of the youthful merchants. He had hurried to the place to see the fun and if necessary to get the young people out of any difficulty into which they might fall.

The sale was over when he arrived and the children were already spending the money they had so cleverly earned. He had followed them into the warehouse, arriving just in time to see his baby held aloft by an elephant. The Major's heart

action was perfect and his blood pressure one that a man of forty might have envied, otherwise the shock might have proved fatal. As it was, he pulled himself together the moment he realized his child was all right and was enjoying herself. He had read of the seemingly unaccountable affections shown by elephants and at the time he and Josephine had taken the famous ride on Susan the Hindu keeper had told him much of the interesting personality of his charge. Nevertheless, the Major was more satisfied to have his only offspring in his own grip rather than in an elephant's trunk. He held her close and thanked his stars that Minerva had not seen what he had seen.

"Who are your friends, Billy?" he asked.

"Come on and I'll introduce you."

"They're my friends too, Daddy," cried Josephine, "an' I'm gonter have Deci come

live with me always forever an' ever, amen."

"Oh, you are, are you?" laughed her father. "Mother will have to have her say-so about that."

Billy led his old friend up to the monkey cage where Peruny Pearline and her children were standing gazing with all their eyes at the amusing creatures. Josephine had not seen the monkeys and her interest in them was intense. One sad little ape in a cage by itself appealed especially to the child. The animal evidently suffered with cold and was dressed in a little blue jacket with brass buttons.

"What makes that little monkey so misable, Daddy?" she asked. "I reckon he's lonesome. I wish his papa would get back in the cage with his little child."

"Is a monkey out of the cage?" asked the Major in some alarm. Strange things

seemed to be happening in this menagerie.

"Yes! There's his papa standing right there lookin' at him! There! Can't you see him, Billy?"

Billy looked where the child pointed. Standing by the cage gazing at the sad ape was a wizened little old colored man with a sloping forehead and an abnormally protruding jaw. He was dressed in a long-tailed blue coat trimmed with brass buttons, evidently the grandeur of long bygone coachman days. The resemblance between the ape and the old man was striking.

"Why, if it ain't Uncle Jimmy-Jawed Jupiter come to town too!" exclaimed Billy.

"Howdy, Uncle Jupiter! I didn't know you were here."

"I jes' done comed," said the old man meekly.

"Does Aunt Cindy know you are in town?"

"She ain't been reformed yit er my revival," he said pompously.

"I want you to meet the Major, Uncle Jupiter," said Billy. "This is him an' this is Aunt Minerva's baby."

The old fellow shook hands solemnly with the Major and Josephine.

"Daddy, kin his child talk too?" whispered Josephine in the Major's ear. "I didn't know monkeys could talk, only Polly parrots."

"Shhh!" admonished her father explaining to her in a whisper that Uncle Jimmy-Jawed Jupiter was not really a monkey but the husband of her beloved Aunt Cindy.

"I'm gonter take him home to live with us too," announced the child. "Kin he hang by his tail?"

The Major had to silence the inquisitive

Josephine with warnings that she might hurt poor Uncle Jupiter's feelings! Then Billy introduced Peruny Pearline and all her children from Admiral Farragut Moses the Prophet Esquire down to Mirabile Dictu, giving each one his or her full name, a feat of memory not to be despised.

"How long will you be in town?" asked the Major with interest.

"We 'low ter ketch the down train 'bout midnight," answered Peruny Pearline. "I got a passel er tradin' ter do what'll keep me jumpin' from now on 'til dark."

"Well, we shall be pleased to have you come and dine at our house," said the Major.

"Lawsamussy, Marse Major, you ain't called on fer no such hospitleality," declared Peruny Pearline. "We done brunged along a bite ter eat. Co'se if you mought manage ter keep the chilluns, at

leas' some six or seben er thim, whilst me an' Mose an' Oleander does the tradin', I would be some grateful. Alice Ann will stay an' keep keer er the chilluns. I wa' a layin' by ter come pay my respecks ter Aunt Cindy 'fo' I lef' town — an' er co'se I couldn't a drug the chilluns off 'thout'n they laid eyes on Billy. Billy's same as the Angel Gabrul ter the chilluns."

So it was arranged that some six or seven of the children were to go home with Billy while the mother and what was left of her offspring did their shopping.

"You are going with us too, Uncle Jupiter, aren't you?" asked the Major.

"Well, I 'lows I'd like ter see Cindy, bein' as I ain't saw'd her sence big meetin', two year gone by, but I ain't so sho' 'bout trus'in' myse'f wif Cindy 'thout the stren'th retained from — er — er — the consumlation er 'ligion."

Aunt Cindy had made a visit to the plantation two years before at big-meeting time and had intended to go again the following summer, but her mistress had been ailing and so the faithful soul had postponed her trip. This was Uncle Jupiter's first venture towards visiting his better half at her home in town.

"I am sure Aunt Cindy will be delighted to see you," insisted the genial Major.

Uncle Jimmy-Jawed Jupiter was not so sure but determined to trust himself to the tender mercies of Billy and the Major. They surely would protect him if Aunt Cindy should prove unruly.

"You can come in my buggy with Josephine and me," said the Major. "I have some marketing to do to supplement the dinner that Aunt Cindy has prepared for a much smaller number than she will have to feed. Billy, you take the rest of them in

your pony cart. I reckon you will have to make several loads of them."

Off went the Major in his red-wheeled buggy with his swift little mare, Josephine standing between his knees helping to drive and the old colored man sitting beside him, glad of such a stout aid in case Aunt Cindy turned "ructious."

Such provisions as the Major piled in the back of his buggy: beefsteak and bananas, cream-puffs and charlotte-russe, pies and pickled pigs-feet, ginger-cakes and sardines! Uncle Jupiter's eyes rolled in ecstatic expectation of delights to come. Surely his Cindy's lot had fallen in pleasant places if this was the way her master usually did the marketing. Uncle Jupiter began to contemplate the possibility of remaining with his Cindy. If only she would be kind to him and not be so quick to pick out his failings, how nice it would

be for him to remain in town for the winter at least. He had come on the excursion with no such thought. In fact he had not been certain even that he would go to see his Cindy.

The Major managed by expeditious purchasing and rapid driving to reach home before Billy with his first cart load of guests. He broke the news to his wife and Aunt Cindy that there would be many guests for dinner. Miss Minerva had become accustomed to her major's wholesale hospitality and accepted the inevitable, even when it meant some six or seven little darkeys to be served by Aunt Cindy in the kitchen. As for Aunt Cindy, she was so overcome by the arrival of the faithless old Uncle Jimmy-Jawed Jupiter she had no room for emotions concerning the children of Peruny Pearline.

"Whe'fo' you done comed here a traip-

sin' 'roun' arfter me?" she demanded of her husband, who looked more like the monkey's papa than ever as he stood by the towering Aunt Cindy gazing up to her with the appealing eyes of the lonesome little ape who had so engrossed the sympathy of Josephine.

"I done been drawed ter come set eyes on my own wedded wife befo' the Marster calls me," he whined.

"Yes you is!" she snorted. "You been drawed ter come set eyes on them wild animules. You can't fool me, nigger. Well, sence you is here, don't git under my feet. I's gotter tu'n aroun' right smart ter feed all them gran'babies er Aunt Blue-Gum Tempy's. You jes' go on out ter my house — 'tain't no cabin, min' you — an' you wait thar 'til I calls you ter dinner. An' don't you set too hard on my cheers an' don't you tread too hard on my cyarpets."

"All right, Cindy," was his meek rejoinder. "But you ain't a gwine ter fergit me whin the victuals is up, is you?"

"G'long! You allus did make a god er yo' belly! G'long!"

Old Jupiter was very pleased to g'long. He had a wholesome fear of Aunt Cindy, whom he knew it was impossible to fool. She knew him for the fraud he was and she never lost an opportunity to let him know she understood him.

"Well, ain't Cindy fixed up gran'?" he said to himself as he stepped on the highly prized front porch. "She done got some white folks fer sho'. A house wif blin's, gal'ry, railin' an' all. Painted, too! Thain't no po' white folks' white washin' smeared over dis here house. I reckon I'll make out ter put up wif Cindy fer a while an' res' my bones here, anyhow 'til spring. Moughty po' pickin's endurin' of the winter

fer a gemman what ain't ter say ve'y spry on his laigs."

The interior of Aunt Cindy's house was even more inviting than the outside. It was nicely furnished, a bright red carpet on the floor and gay pictures on the wall, curtains at the windows and a small wood stove keeping it warm and cosy.

"Ef she ain't got a sofy couch, too!" he exclaimed. "She ain't let on ter me 'bout all these here luxuriouses. I reckon she was scairt I mought come see her befo' now."

The old man chuckled and sat down on the couch, remembering his wife's admonitions and sitting down carefully. He drew his feet up from the carpet. He must not anger her by stepping too heavily on the grand red carpet.

"I 'low I won't w'ar the sofy out any mo' a layin' on it than I would a settin' on it,"

he murmured, the heat from the tight drum stove making him drowsy. In a moment he was fast asleep.

It was the self-same couch that used to be in the loft over the wood shed where Wilkes Booth Lincoln had taken his first nap after running away from the plantation to find his Billy.

CHAPTER XIX

THE MAJOR'S PROMISE

HE party in the kitchen went off without a hitch. Between the Major's marketing and Aunt Cindy's cooking nothing was left to be desired.

"I wish I was a little cullud chil'," sighed Josephine. "They has so much more fun than white chilluns."

"Say colored, my dear," corrected her mother, "and child."

Josephine's use of negro dialect was never so pronounced as Billy's, but occasionally she dropped into the vernacular of her colored friends.

"Well, anyhow I wish I was one. They's always so many more of them. White folks never do have but jes' one chil' an' they

don't have nobody to play with. 'Sides they have to be all time eatin' in the dining room. I want to eat in the kitchen with Aunt Cindy an' Nicky an' Deci an' all her brothers an' sisters. I want to sop up 'lasses an put my knife in my mouth. I want to sit by the monkey's papa an' see how he chaws with his jaw a stickin' out like this."

Josephine stuck out her little round chin in imitation of old Uncle Jupiter.

"I uster eat with them lots of times down on the plantation," sighed Billy. "I surely do wish I could go down to the plantation sometimes. I come mighty near forgettin' how it looks down there. I'd like to go an' take Jimmy —"

"An' me, Billy, you would take me?"

"Sure! I wouldn't go without you, but I don't see myself going with anybody," Billy sighed again.

"Minerva," said Josephine with her most engaging smile, "I done made 'rangements for Deci to stay here all the time."

"Who is Deci?" asked her mother with a puzzled air.

"Why Deci's the nices' little cullud girl — I mean colored girl — you ever seen. She's the one with all them pink ribbons on her hair. She an' me's gonter play together all the time, an' she ain't never gonter fuss none an' is gonter give up all the time. She don't know nothin' 'tall 'bout nothin', an' keeps on askin': 'Who dat? What dat? Whar dat?' She says she kin stay 'cause her mother is got chilluns to spare. She's older than me, but she ain't a mite bigger. Kin she stay?"

"She cannot!" declared Miss Minerva with such determination in her tone that Josephine felt from the beginning her cause was lost. "I do not intend to have

any more of those plantation darkeys settling on me. It is all very well to have Aunt Cindy and Wilkes Booth Lincoln, who have proven themselves good and faithful, but two are enough. No more! No more!" she warned as Josephine leant against her looking into her face with appealing eyes.

"I wisht I had asked Daddy first. He'd a said yes an' you wouldn't a been so 'cided 'bout 'fusin'. Daddy's the kindes' man. He don't never squeeze his lips so tight together that they ain't even no place lef' to kiss. When little white chilluns wants little colored chilluns to come live with 'em my Daddy don't never pretty near shake his head off a sayin' 'No mo'! No mo!'"

Josephine paused, rather hoping her diplomatic praise of her father would have its effect on her stern mother, but another glance at the tightly closed lips convinced

her that her diplomacy had somehow failed.

"Why don't you say: 'Josephine, go ask your father what he thinks 'bout this little Deci a comin' to live with us?'" she insisted. "Daddy don't never say 'no' so hard 'thout consultin' you. My daddy jes' hates to be all time sayin' no. I reckon you thinks no is prettier than yes, Minerva. I should think you'd kinder run out of noes an' have to begin on yeses, but maybe you is got noes jes' packed in tight somewhere in yo' stomic and yo' yeses is kinder scarce."

"Josephine, you have said enough now," exclaimed Miss Minerva, with some impatience. "You cannot have this child come here to live. Do you understand?"

"Yessum, I understand," and the child drew her lips to a tight line, thereby giving her chubby face a ludicrous resemblance to her mother's. "I understand but I ain't

done. I'm a gonter begin all over prayin' for a sister, but it ain't gonter be no sister this time, it's a gonter be a brother — two brothers — maybe three brothers. Billy says I comed to you 'cause he prayed so hard an' I'm a gonter pray heaps harder than Billy ever did. Sometimes Billy opens his eyes an' peeks when he prays, but I'm gonter scrooch mine up so tight God'll jes' have ter hear. If you let Deci live with us I'll pray, not so turrible hard, for jes' one little sister — but if Deci can't come I'm gonter pray for whole heaps of boys — an' they'll fuss an' fight an' scratch up the furnisher, an' play ball in the parlor an' bus' the lookin' glass an' make holes in the carpet with nails in their shoes, an' — an' — "

"That is enough, Josephine," but Miss Minerva shuddered in spite of herself at the picture her little daughter drew of what heaps of boys might do in a household.

"If God sends you three boys, I'm a thinking 'bout havin' one of them be a Chinabol an' one a Injine an' one of them as black as black," was Josephine's parting shot as she left her mother's presence to

seek her little new-found friend Deci and break to her the bad news that she could not come live with the white folks after all.

Loud was the lamentation of Deci. The stiff pink bows on her wrapped plaits trembled from the storm of her weeping.

"Cryin' don't do no good when Minerva says a hard no," comforted Josephine. "She wouldn't let you stay not even if you broke out with measles or somethin' — not even smallpox. But you've got a whole lot of cullud chilluns to play with an' I ain't got none."

"Cullud chilluns ain't no treat ter me! I wants ter play wif white chilluns lak Wilkes Booth Lincoln does. My Mammy ain't a keerin' if I stays. She says yo' maw kin keep 'Postle Peter an' 'Pistle Paul too if she wants em, but they's pow'ful grabby, is them twinses."

In spite of Peruny Pearline's willingness to part with three or more of her children, Miss Minerva remained adamant and finally the midnight train bore all of them off, tired and sleepy (all that were not already asleep), very full of food, very rumpled and sticky, but with heads full of

the wonders of the town and of the circus and of Wilkes Booth Lincoln's good fortune in having found a permanent home with such a liberal provider as the Major.

The midnight train which bore Peruny Pearline and her children back to the plantation did not have as a passenger Uncle Jimmy-Jawed Jupiter, although Aunt Cindy did her best to make him go.

"I'd pick you up an' tote you to the flatform if I wa'n't scairt I'd git so mad I'd trun you under the cyars," she said, looking down on her sleeping spouse. But the old couch was soft and Uncle Jupiter rested there very comfortably until morning. At the first streak of dawn Aunt Cindy was stirring and when once she stirred she allowed no black folks to lie abed.

"Git up from thar, you lazy critter!" she cried. "Git up from thar an' go ketch

the fus' train back ter the plantation."

"I ain't seed you fer so long, Cindy. It don't look nachel fer me ter be a pickin' up an' leavin' you whin I ain't much mo'n got here," he pleaded. "I ain't a gonter be a mite er trouble ter nobody. Why don't you leave me res' a while here wif you?"

"You triflin' no 'count critter! I kin see you now jes' a settin' thar in my house er on my po'ch a jawin' an' chawin', chawin' an' jawin', not arnin' yo' salt, let alone all the bakim drippin's an' sorghum you expects ter git. Now if you wa' some 'count an' could wash winders, what I'm too hefty ter set in, it mought be another thing. But you ain't. You ain't no 'count now an' you never was no 'count, an' you never will be no 'count."

The old man looked appealingly at her and two tears formed in his eyes and ran

down his face. She was somewhat softened.

"Well, stay then! That is, if the Major an' Miss Minerva is willin'. I'll go ax 'em. But look here, Jupiter, I got one thing ter say: ef I ketch you a cussin' an' sw'arin', even ter yo'self lak I done hearn you sometimes, I'll t'ar you lim' from lim', er my name ain't Lucinda. Miss Minerva won't even 'low her own wedded husband ter cuss an' sw'ar an' you know she ain't a gonter put up with you a doin' it."

"Yassum!" he said meekly, but when his wife waddled off to the house the old man shook his head and an expression almost vindictive came over his face.

"Whe'fo' Gawd done made that ooman so big an' me so little bit? 'Tain't nachel. 'Tain't right. Ef I had er been the big un I 'low I could er made her stan' aroun'. I reckon he done made her big an' me little so she could wuck fer me. As the Good

Book says: 'Gawd moves in a mischievous way his blunders ter perfawm.' He sho' do."

In spite of Miss Minerva's determination not to let any more of the plantation darkeys settle on her, she feared it would be wrong to separate husband and wife. She had always felt it was not exactly moral for Aunt Cindy to have left her husband, although the old woman had assured her that Uncle Jupiter had taken the initiative.

"Co'se, Miss Minerva, ef he stays he wucks," said Aunt Cindy at the close of the interview with her mistress, "wucks ter pay fer his keep."

"Of course," agreed Miss Minerva. "Send him to me and I'll put him to work immediately."

Aunt Cindy went off chuckling. Well she knew that Jupiter would stand for just so much exertion and no more. She sent her husband in immediately to get his in-

structions and with admonitions to refrain from his favorite pastime of swearing.

"Well, Mistis, here I is," he said bowing low before Miss Minerva.

"Are you accustomed to working around a house?" asked that lady with a note of severity in her voice.

"What me? No'm, not me! I ain't never done sech a thing in all my life. You kin arsk anybody down ter the plantation. I wouldn't do sech a thing as that fer nothin'. No'm, not ol' Jupiter!'

"Well, then, I think you will hardly do. I understood from your wife that you would work around the house —'

"Yes, Mistis! Yes, Mistis!"

"But if you are not willing to do what I want you had better go right back to the plantation."

"Mebbe I ain't hearn you jes' right. What is it you done arsked me does I do?"

"I asked you if you are capable of doing work around a house. What did you think I said?"

"I thunk you arsked me do I cuss when I wucks 'roun' the house."

Uncle Jimmy-Jawed Jupiter stayed one week lacking a day with his wife. During that time Wilkes Booth Lincoln found his labors so lightened he hardly knew what to do with himself. Aunt Cindy transferred her work-creating activities to the old man. She made him split kindling, sweep porches and pavements, wash windows, polish stoves and grates, beat rugs, clean out the hen house and do any and everything in the way of work her ingenuity could devise. She never let him sit down for a moment. Six days from the time of his arrival the midnight down train carried back a passenger wiser and sadder than when he had come to town. He crept away without say-

ing good-bye to a soul, without even waiting for his wages due the next day.

The morning after his departure when Aunt Cindy brought in breakfast there was a broad smile on her good old face.

"You look happy, Aunt Cindy," remarked the Major.

"Happy! I got reason ter be. My lawful, wedded husband is done lef' me agin."

"Oh, Aunt Cindy, I am shocked!" exclaimed Miss Minerva.

"So is I, Miss Minerva, shocked but not ter say 'stonished. I been a thinkin' if I put enough wuck on Jupiter he'd sneak off an' now he's done did it. He ain't no han' ter wuck even if the victuals do come easy."

"Aren't you sorry at all?"

"No'm, ain't ter say a mite sorry. You see, Miss Minerva, I done los' my taste fer that ol' nigger so long ago I cyarn't perten' ter no sentimentals to'ads him."

The children all missed poor old Uncle Jupiter. He was always kind to them, telling such amusing stories about animals and cutting up such funny capers dancing "short-dog" and the "passamala." Wilkes Booth Lincoln missed him sorely because once more Aunt Cindy's mania for making work was centered on him.

"Peas an' pies is done now," he declared sadly. (By "peas and pies" is meant "peace and pious." It is an expression quite common in the southern states.)

Josephine climbed on the Major's knee and wept piteously against his immaculate shirt front.

"I wish the monkey's papa would stay to here," she sobbed. "All the nice people goes away. 'Thain't nobody for me to play with now. I wants Deci an' 'Postle an' 'Pistle an' all Miss Peruny Pearline's chilluns."

"I miss all of them too," said Billy, leaning against his old friend's arm, feeling almost sorry for the moment that he was too big to get on that other knee and be cuddled up like Josephine.

"Say, Maje, don't you reckon sometimes I might go back to the plantation for a little while? I like it up here with you and Aunt Minerva — like it a whole lot, but sometimes the smell of things down yonder, the pines and the sycamores in the river bottom — and cat-fish frying in the cabins — kinder comes back to me and it seems like I can't stand it any longer not to be there. I wake up in the night and think I hear the steamboat a blowin' as it comes 'round the bend and the water a splashin' as the stern wheeler churns it up to make a landin'. There is something 'bout the plantation that kinder owns me. I feel somehow it must miss me kinder like I miss it."

The Major put his free arm around Billy and drew him closer, while little Josephine caught up one of his hands and held it to her cheek. She did not know exactly what Billy was talking about but felt in some way that he had a sorrow that was even deeper than hers in not having Deci to play with.

"You are right, Billy," said the Major, "I believe the plantation does miss you. I have been thinking for some time that it was my duty to take you down there and help you look into your affairs. The overseer has had it all his own way for too long and in my opinion the property should be yielding more than it is. I am not much of a farmer, but that doesn't excuse me for letting your plantation go to rack and ruin for lack of a little guidance."

"Jo's goin' too," said the little girl.

"We may all of us go," said the Major.

"It would be a pleasant change to pick up the whole family and go spend the summer down on Billy's plantation."

"Can Jimmy go?" asked Billy. "I've always wanted to show Jimmy the plantation."

"Yes, I reckon Jimmy can go too," smiled the Major.

"An' kin Deci b'long to me?" asked Josephine.

"Yes, Deci can belong to you. Of course that is if your mother agrees to our plans," the Major added quickly.

Just then Aunt Cindy came in the room.

"Aunt Cindy, what do you say to our spending next summer down on the plantation?" asked the Major. "Don't you think it might be a good plan to take the whole family and go for a good visit?"

"Lawdy, Major, I thinks it would be fine, but I ain't so sho' 'bout Miss Minerva.

Looks lak she am pow'ful 'pendent on plummin' tubs an' all sech town doin's. I'd sho' admire ter go myse'f, special if we hits thar in Big Meetin' time.

"I tell you, Major, you mought kinder crope 'roun' a leetle an' git Doc Sanford ter circumscribe that the country am the place fer Josemphine in summer time an' thain't no sich healthy spot on the Mississip' as the ol' plantation. I low Miss Minerva'd be willin' ter fo'go all the indelicacies of town life if she knowed it wa' fer the good of Josemphine. We's as good as gone if she gits that in her haid." The old woman chuckled.

"What you laughin' 'bout, Aunt Cindy?" asked Josephine.

"I'm a larfin' when I thinks er Miss Minerva on the ol' Plantation," said Aunt Cindy.

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